Reference section

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JANE AUSTEN

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Her Life and Art

BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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INTRODUCTION

A GOOD many years ago a Sixth Form boy at Charterhouse who was writing essays for me had for his subject the 'Novels of Jane Austen.' After due study and reflection the painstaking critic summed up pithily: Jane Austen's novels were fit for women and children, not for men.

What precisely was the breadth of literary experience that went to form his mental background and standard of taste, I cannot say; certainly it was beyond the ordinary schoolboy range of adventure and romance. I know, moreover, that he took all his work seriously, and this, so far as he had the power to judge, was a serious judgment. But perhaps it was a little hard on an immature lad to put him to this test in order to see what he could make of something that demands more than a boy's capacity to analyse and evaluate – a teacher's test, perhaps, an experiment to discover the potentialities of the field that waited to be tilled. There is a season for all things; his answer was according to his age, and no libel on the boy's taste and capacity. If the poet might speak not unkindly of

> young men, whom Aristotle deemed
> Unfit to hear moral philosophy,

so we speak with equal kindness of young men who are still unfit to discover the spell of Jane Austen. Are there

not many, indeed, among maturer souls, who, looking back to their livelier teens, have a self-accusing memory of the Austen world as a world of an almost dead level, domestically restricted, unadventurous in episode, conventionalised in the manners and language of a past epoch, a memory which pictures it as a flat plain with no jagged mountains nor rushing rivers to encounter, a level sea with no hurricanes nor wrecks nor gaudy pirates? It is only later that the boy grows up to make his discoveries; the plain has its subtle folds, the quiet sea its mortal depths, its hidden tides; the eye filled with experience recognises the power and the truth implicit in the quiet lines of the picture. With larger knowledge one comes to wonder at what had been missed beneath the repose of a noiseless art. The worker's hand was strong in the knowledge of its limits; it reached its special perfection by keeping within them. So it comes about that what seems to the young, the unformed critic, a simplicity suitable for children and a domesticity proportioned to women and the home, stands in the eye of maturer readers as a work within its appointed range, of balanced art, full of keen observation of human nature, upright, impartial, seasoned with a humour that does not spare the oddities, the vanities, the petty meannesses of individuals any more than it does not fail to recognise the golden thread so constantly interwoven into the baser material of human character.

Against the youthful dictum that the Austen novels are not fit for men's reading, it is curious to note that of the admirers and almost idolaters of Jane who have sung her praises, the majority are men, who seem to have felt a special appeal in the quality of her art and its particular form of realism; the matter knowledgeably

chosen from her actual experiences; the keen imagination not playing in the clouds, but re-creating in the freedom of the written page the characters she had observed, the circumstances and feelings of her own as well as her neighbours' life; the truth to nature that made of each person not a mere type or caricature, but a very human individual, the best learning the lesson of life through human weakness and error, the worst still not without some streak of human goodness or sympathy. One may think of her realism as like that of the great Dutch artists, whose imagination worked through the perception of light penetrating and shaping – which is to say, in short, poetising – the actual forms of everyday life. No need to distort these forms in order to attract attention or stir up dull complacency. Here is vivid life in the familiar forms of the actual; natural yet enhanced, raised, as a mathematician would say, to a higher power; imaginative yet not unreal, real but not prosaic. Such is the art of Jane Austen. Mr. Rhydderch, deeply versed in the law and the prophets of the Janeites, devotes himself especially to illustrating from the scattered biographical details and lively references in her familiar letters, all too few, which have survived, how her stories and characters draw vivid traits from her own surroundings, her own goings and comings; from the family contrasts of naval and clerical life; from town visits and country parsonages; from the little ways, amusing or annoying, of aunts and neighbours and in-laws; from the eager life of a large family of children or careful housekeeping in the cottage below the big house; how, in fact, real caps may be found to fit quite a number of heads among her characters. To these persons are appropriately assigned what others were

noted as having said or done upon similar occasions in real life, so appropriately, so spontaneously, that they carry conviction as real people. Have not some of them enriched our language and our social background with types as clear and permanent as those of history?

What awaits the reader in this book is not merely a point of view, a personal criticism, a literary exercise; it is a picture of the essential Jane Austen built up with manifold touches from the indications scattered through her letters and the parallels discoverable in her novels. The enthusiasm which has sustained the hidden burden of analytical detail brings forth a fresh and enjoyable synthesis. The novels redouble their interest as we discover Jane's very self ever more clearly in their reflection of her life and thought, her surroundings and habits and tastes, from the familiar shrubberies where she makes her good folk walk, down to the catchwords of the moment which she affected. The conventional forms and mannerisms of the period which eager modernity hastens to condemn as tedious, become more gently tolerable when they are made to slip into their place as part of the personal make-up of the writer so transparently revealed – just the starch, so to say, of the garments that helped to present her in her habit as she lived. Working over the old ground and revealing its personal interpretations, Mr. Rhydderch manages to bring Jane Austen herself before the living eye of her readers. They feel her presence in the pages they turn, and for quickened interest and enhanced pleasure must needs thank their new guide and interpreter, who has already given them a taste of his quality in the *Cornhill Magazine*.

LEONARD HUXLEY.

TO

AMY, SARAH AND WILL

JANE AUSTEN

P

I

THE AGE

When Jane Austen was born, and not many miles distant, Gilbert White was preserving young mice in brandy and writing his *Natural History*. Cowper's *Task* was yet undone, and Walter Scott, a little boy of four, was wrapped in sheepskin on a farm in Sandy-Knowe. Prosy old Crabbe had abandoned his profession; and William Cobbet, not long since, had finished the rudiments of his education on that sand-hill at Bourn. Johnson had just returned from his tour in the Hebrides; and the hand that penned *She Stoops to Conquer* had not long lain listless in the grave. The prodigal brain whose fancies had woven Random the Roisterer, and Pickle the Trickster, had been dead four years, and the creator of *Pamela* had passed away but fourteen years before. Twenty years had elapsed since the author of *Tom Jones* had gone the way of all flesh. When *Evelina* appeared, Jane was being nursed in the village of Steventon. Gibbon had yet to complete the first volume of his *Decline and Fall*; and in the words of Trelawny, 'Malthus had not yet enlightened the world.'

It was indeed a memorable age. When at the age of forty-one, Jane Austen was laid to rest in Winchester Cathedral, Mrs. Gatty was teaching her dolls the Greek declensions; Maria Edgeworth was fifty; and the author of *Jane Eyre* was a babe on the breast. Carlyle had just

left the Academy at Annan; Wordsworth was snug at Rydal Mount revising *Peter Bell*; and Charles Lamb was still in the coils of 'Sempiternal muckworms.' The *Prisoner of Chillon* had just been published; Landor was soliloquising at Florence; and Keats, with bowed head, was weaving a poetic romance. Macaulay was soaking his mind with Cicero at Aspenden Hall; Balzac had just entered the Sorbonne; and Shelley was yet to wrestle with *Prometheus* amid the 'mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla.' Tennyson was only in the second of Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages'; Thackeray had not yet entered the 'slaughter house' at Smithfield; and Dickens, a little urchin of five, was 'ocularly perusing the lineaments' that made the second chapter of *David Copperfield*. The author of *Adam Bede* was yet unborn, and eleven years were to pass, before *Gentleman Georgy* – Stevenson's 'master of us all' – saw the light of day.

To impress the period Jane Austen was born to and lived in upon the reader, we offer this somewhat florid opening as an excuse for eschewing most dates.

II

'UNBAK'D AND DOUGHY YOUTH'

JANE AUSTEN was the seventh of eight children born to George and Cassandra Austen. The son of a surgeon, George was orphaned at the early age of six, and left thus destitute of parents and property, was fostered by a kind uncle who gave him every practical support and a good education, which no doubt helped him to procure the Rectory of Steventon and later added to it that of Deane. The living secure, he marries a parson's daughter, Cassandra Leigh, among whose forebears were a Duke, a Master of Balliol, and the Lord Mayor of London in the year of Queen Elizabeth's accession. To us, however, Jane Austen is the most important offshoot of this heritage, without whom, this lineage is of little consequence.

With babies following one another in quick succession – James, George, Edward, Henry, Cassandra, Francis . . . Charles – the penultimate seventh arrives. On the threshold of a certain Christmas, the father announces, 'Another girl . . . as like Henry as Cassy is to Ned. . . . She is to be Jenny'; but she was christened Jane. Expected in November, she arrived in December, a month overdue. For this miscalculation the father blames his old age. Whether this betokened to the wise a fuller maturity, or to the superstitious a richer prophecy, we cannot tell. Here in this rural Hampshire

parsonage, far from the busy hum of men, a child is born, who was destined to become the greatest woman writer in English literature. Here stood the house, surrounded by sloping meadows, well sprinkled with elm trees, in which she lived for twenty-five years. This was the home whose upper floors were supported by white-washed beams, which projected with naked simplicity into the rooms below. Here were the shrubberies she loved, the woods and walks she rambled in, and the church she worshipped at. Here she read the first book, and saw the first play acted. Here she formed her first intentions, and fostered that love of literature and writing. Here were her first friendships formed, and her abiding love of the country fashioned. Here was the upstairs drawing-room, with its common-looking carpet, its painted press with shelves above for books, the piano, the scanty furniture, and cheaply papered walls. Here also Mrs. Austen, 'like Hezekiah,' offered to show all her riches – 'the dairy, the bull and six cows, not much bigger than Jackasses – the duckies and ducks and chickens.'

With so large a family as the Austens possessed, extravagance was of necessity eschewed, and a wise, if not rigorous economy, was perforce practised. The father's income, certainly a large one for the age, unless there were some commitments of which we do not know, was augmented by taking a few pupils – evidently the sons of gentlemen – and his expenses lessened by undertaking his own sons' education, which along with a little judicious farming, and the mother's making and mending, added considerably to the comfort, health, and ultimate well-being of this gifted family. What Jane said of the Heywoods, we may say of them, 'they staid at home, that their children might get out.'

Jane Austen, who in her works delighted in large families, mirrored the home life she was so happily brought up in. Of her six brothers, the eldest was a clergyman, the two youngest became admirals, the third, by adoption, was heir to vast estates, the fourth filled many rôles and few successfully; the second, who as a child was subject to fits, lived sixty-one years, and that is all we know of him. The family circle was further extended by the addition in their turn, of nine sisters-in-law, two pairs of whom were sisters, and one the widow of a French Count, four of her brothers having married twice; and two between them were fathers to twenty-two children. Of the ten children fathered by one of these, two became second wives, another a second husband, two married twice, and one three times. Cassandra never married, her sweetheart having died. Jane remained single; though, according to Kipling's 'Captain Mosse,' 'she was fruitful in the 'ighest sense o' the word; she *did* leave lawful issue in the shape o' one son, an' 'is name was 'Enery James.' She had, however, several other 'darling children,' one of whom was *Emma*. Really, it would not be necessary to go beyond the circumference of her own immediate family, Jane had sufficient material to furnish a few more novels, without exhausting the supply which her quiverful brothers continued to multiply, a fact that no doubt accounts in her letters for the many humorous shafts on 'lying in' and 'troublesome embryos.' The family, with the exception of Jane, were surprisingly longevous; little Methuselahs in fact, their combined ages averaging seventy-two years.

It has been suggested that Jane Austen, like her brothers and sister, was put out to nurse in a neighbouring cottage, a custom not uncommon in those days. We

know, however, that at the early age of six, she accompanied Cassandra, aged nine, to a school at Oxford, kept by the stiff-mannered widow of a Principal of Brasenose College; who removed later, together with her pupils, to Southampton. Here Jane was taken seriously ill with typhus fever, and was only saved by the timely arrival of her mother with a remedy. In a few years we find the two sisters, this time at the Abbey School, Reading, kept in those days by the one-legged widow of a Frenchman; a good-natured woman, and it is surmised, the early prototype of 'Mrs. Goddard.' How long she was at this school is not known for certain, two years perhaps at the most. This, so far as we have been able to glean, was the sum total of her canonical education.

It is most unfortunate, that after leaving school, there are so few details extant of Jane Austen's early life at Steventon. 'Short and easy will be the task of the mere biographer,' wrote her brother Henry. Even her nephew says, 'that any description of this period did he attempt it could be little better than a fancy piece.' Lord Brabourne goes even further; he thought her life so uneventful, that six lines would complete the whole record of her existence. And John Bailey, though he knew the whole story with its gleanings of a hundred years, thought 'it all came to very little,' and said, 'she did nothing of interest except the writing of her books.' But how Mr. Squire could say, knowing so much, that no critic on Jane Austen would find his essay complicated by the intrusion of biography we really do not understand. To us, though we leave out the surmises, most of which are founded on a base of facts, her life and works are so interwoven, that in every line of the novelist we see the woman Jane, and in every character

she talks to us. There is hardly a person or a place, but we visualise her in being. We can safely say that in this brief and happy seed-time between leaving Reading and her first known letters, our authoress was leisurely following the bent of her mind, and, left thus to 'gratify the wanderings of an unripe taste,' was laying by the rich reminiscences upon which she was to draw with such lavish art. Compared with her many brothers, whose education was of 'so much higher a degree,' Jane's voluntary apprenticeship in the profession of letters was an earnest of her unwavering resolve for the career of writing.

In this age of what George Moore – in one of his Conversations – calls 'mass mediocrity and pedagogy,' where education has become a fetish, and learning a religion, it is refreshing and ennobling to contemplate for a moment the wonderful achievement of this little lady, who, leaving school at the age of nine, with the most elementary knowledge of the three 'Rs,' could boast before she was sixteen a sheaf of fancies and a degree of authorship that might puzzle any novelist; with a paucity of so-called erudition of which any County School boy would have been ashamed, and yet works, on reading which, so Mr. Chesterton says, 'one could laugh, as one laughs over the great burlesques of Peacock and Max Beerbohm.' We cannot picture her as, 'nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary bird, or watering a rose bush,' like Catherine Morland. Neither do we think, that she had any predilection for boys' games. To write, however, was natural to her; writing was the element she was at home in, it was, in fact, the breath of her nostrils. Here she lived untrammelled by any curriculum – none to dishearten her, awed by no

grave looks, overcome by no admonitions, mortified by no one's reflections. With congenial companions and conscious aspirations far above her age, she lived fully, and though showing in some ways an uncommon maturity and precocity of mind, she could participate in every passing amusement as befitted her genius with the zest of early girlhood.

During these early years, the family farewells and welcomes were frequent. Tears and laughter mingled as sons went and came again. Jane's sensitive nature would share, unduly we think, in the rise and fall of these domestic flutterings. James had been to Oxford and France, and was back again at Oxford, where Henry was soon to follow. Francis had finished with the Naval Academy, and was now on board a frigate bound to the East Indies. Edward, like 'Richard Feverel,' was about to make the 'Grand Tour,' 'culminating on the Alps and lapsing in Rome.' Charles, the baby Austen – his sisters' 'own particular little brother' – was a little boy of five. And Cassandra, 'dark-eyed Cassandra,' where she was, Jane would be. These were the two inseparables and 'formidables' of the Austen family; at school and through life, Jane's effusions were incomplete without Cassandra. 'If Cassy were to have her head cut off,' said the mother, 'Jenny would follow suit.' In all things Jane deferred to her sister. As only three years divide them in age, they remind us of Trollope's Griselda and Florinda Grantly; the younger 'as usual, implicitly acceded to the dictum' of the elder.

For want of positive knowledge one could fill in the gaps of these early years by reading the first chapters of *Northanger Abbey*; and by omissions visualise the missing essentials of her material personality, from the character-

istics she portrayed as belonging to Catherine Morland. It has been said that Jane was the least exclusive of the family, and we quite believe it. From what we have been able to glean of her character, this much we know, that in this, the most impressionable age, the years between nine and twenty-one, there could hardly have been an idle moment in her life. The pen was ever in her hand; she took to it as Giotto did to the brush, and Pope to poetry; and though young, and living far from the tumult of those uproarious times, she must have shared in the knowledge that simmered through from the outside world, and certainly appreciated its gravity.

One happy and romantic link that must have made a deep impression on her mind at this period, was an addition to the family of a Comtesse, in the person of her first cousin Betsy Hancock, the god-daughter and ward of Warren Hastings. Visiting her uncle in this country rectory, she brought with her the airs of Paris; and, being fresh from the Duchess of Cumberland's drawing-room, the pomp of London, and Almack's, her occasional presence at Steventon must have been welcome and seasoned its somewhat quiet life, and to Jane in particular – who hated solemnity – was most interesting.

That Jane and Cassandra were sent to school was not so much a matter of education as of convenience. Their room was required to house the pupils whom their father, in this Austen Academy, 'boarded and booked.' The presence of these pupils prohibited the Austens from inviting relations or friends at any other period than the Christmas and summer holidays, during which their own children would organise their theatricals, using the barn in summer, and the drawing-room in

winter. When these amateur operations began, Jane had just returned from Reading School, and was a little girl of *nine*. Many plays were here acted, and when the last was played she was *fourteen* years of age. To obtain a picture rich in legacies whose sources may be traced back to this early unrecorded period of Jane Austen's life, one has but to turn to the pages of *Mansfield Park*, with its delicious and interwoven incidents written around the rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows*. About this time we find her at Sevenoaks; she is now twelve years old; and this, by the way, was her first visit to Kent and London. Like Mary Bennet, there is no doubt that 'she was adjusting her ideas.' Her critical interjections on the margins of Goldsmith's *History of England*, give our first glimpse of her as a writer. She was then *thirteen*, and the maturity of her judgment is indeed surprising. If between this time until she reached the age of *seventeen*, we know few details of her life as such – not that it matters much – we now know a great deal of what she wrote. In fact, she never ceased to adventure; authorship had possessed her. The 'Effusions of Fancy by a Very Young Lady' poured forth. It was the age of *Love and Freindship*. In four years she had written herself into a volume of most delightful sketches, burlesques, scraps, and two-paged comedies; altogether an amazing and varied list for one so young to write. The dedications to various members of the family are alone worth reading, more so perhaps in the light of our present knowledge. Though interesting, to us very interesting, we doubt indeed, in spite of their innocent charm and great humour, whether their publication would have come about had Miss Austen died after she had written 'Finis' to these effusions. They entertain us,

as most juvenilia do, merely as the incipient complements of the greater works they foreshadowed. Their value we can only estimate as the first stages in the evolution of a great writer, the inconsequent scaffoldings that help in the fruition of any work of art. Had the great novels never been written, no doubt these copybook tales and fantasies would have lain in darkness, and the square box full of letters never been opened. If the novels succeeded so tardily, without them, the others would never have succeeded at all. Like the sketch books of Turner, with their ninety thumbnail skies to the page, and the drawings of blackbirds on the flyleaves of Caesar and Telemachus, they would have rotted, had the great canvasses never been painted. Men are not judged by their beginnings, however ingenious, but only by the sum total of their achievements. Such is the fame of Jane Austen to-day, that the faithful are hunting for early scraps of her work, as the natives of Florence once searched for the rock before which Cimabue stood in amazement, admiring the work of Giotto.

In those early days of her life, amidst so large a family, we are sure that Jane never wanted for incidents to adorn a tale or to point a moral. These spontaneous fancies weighed but lightly upon her mind; the poison was as yet but gently coursing in her veins. She could relax without impatience to follow and participate in all events around her. She was not yet *eighteen*, when Henry had matriculated; Edward and James had married, one the daughter of a knight, the other of a general; and Cassandra had become engaged to a former pupil of her father's. Apart from the many Basingstoke balls, we find her dancing at Southampton, and meet with her in

Gloucester; and once again travelling on her way to Kent. Who will say after this that her life was dull and monotonous?

We are now entering the second phase of Jane Austen's career as a writer, and if some confusion exists as to exactly what works belong to this period, the fact is established beyond doubt of her serious intention to become an author. The time of humorous dedications had passed. The 'Clever Collections of Curious Comments by your Comical Cousin'; the early novelettes with their fictitious 'four-score editions'; and the innocent order to 'Messrs. Demand and Company, to pay Jane Austen, spinster, the sum of one hundred guineas,' were put aside. Jane had now entered the lists with Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More, and Mrs. Radcliffe; with what success we know. The wish, however, was father to the thought, when she 'humbly flattered herself that one of her girlish novels possessed merit beyond any already published.' It was an earnest of an ambition one day to be gratified.

Before she was *twenty-one* years old, her first full dress novel was in the making, the title of which we prefer as *False Impressions* rather than *First Impressions*, as this was the name first given to it by Lord Brabourne. This was followed a year later by *Elinor and Marianne*, which she wrote in the form of letters. Before she was *twenty-three* a third takes shape, which we will call *Susan*. So far as we have been able to discover, this was the last of the Steventon novels; and whether the first became *Pride and Prejudice*, the second *Sense and Sensibility*, or the third was the original of *Northanger Abbey*, as no trace is to be found of the first three, we are really unable to determine. And what little proof there is, is founded more on

hearsay than on fact. This much we know, that a month before Jane was twenty-two she persuaded her father to write a letter to Mr. Cadell, a London publisher, offering a manuscript novel in three volumes, about the length of Miss Burney's *Evelina*; which proposal was declined by return of post. Strange as it appears, twenty-two years afterwards, this very letter was bought by a connection of the family. Even now there is nothing to determine the name of this work, apart from the fact that *False Impressions* was mentioned by Jane in a letter to Cassandra some time after this, in which she writes, 'I do not wonder at your wanting to read it'; and a few months later she warns her, 'not to let Martha read it again, upon any account . . . she is very cunning . . . she means to publish it from memory.'

Whatever the beginnings of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, as we now know them, we feel certain that they retain little of the stone-age of Steventon, and differ from their forerunners as the swan does from its ugly duckling. They were heirs to richer, wider, and deeper years of experience. The outline and plot may have been retained but the colour and detail were the effort of later days, and the genius of taking far greater pains. Between the age of *twenty-one* and *twenty-five*, and before leaving Steventon, her first home, for Bath, Jane Austen had written three novels, not one of which as then written was to see the light of day. This certainly was disappointing, and must have disheartened her. We might say, however, though to her at the time it would have been cold comfort, that this tardy recognition of her genius goaded her to greater effort, and has something to do with the quality upon which her ultimate fame was to rest. Apart from publication, she wanted

for nothing material, but 'the little more' perhaps; for during this period there were many interests to divert her attention, and to mollify any bitterness, if any, that such literary disappointments occasioned. The departure of potential lovers, and the death of Cassandra's intended husband, found them behaving 'with a degree of resolution and propriety which no common mind could evince.' Anyone who seeks the acquaintance of the Austen family or the works of Jane Austen will find them singularly free from any display of superfluous emotion. In spite of disappointment, Jane missed few balls. We sometimes wonder how, with so many engagements, she found time to write at all, though writing at this time, we think, was secondary to a husband. Had Tom Lefroy, her first love, whom she met about this period, shown a little more enterprise and less vanity, Ireland might have missed a great Chief Justice, and England possibly a greater novelist. The trouble with Jane as a letter writer is that you really do not know when she is serious. We are convinced, however, that when twenty years of age, she did like this budding barrister, in spite of his white coat and modest manner. That he was 'excessively laughed at about her,' proves somewhat his infatuation. Like Henry Crawford, the 'pleasing plague had stolen on him,' during the four balls they met and danced at together, and she, like Jane Fairfax, was mildly 'sucking in the sad poison.' Writing to her sister, she asks her to 'imagine everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together . . . and looked forward with great importance to their last ball . . . as she expected to receive an offer from him in the course of the evening . . . and would refuse him, however, unless he promises

to give away his white coat.' 'At length,' she writes, 'the day is come, on which I am to flirt my last, and when you receive this, it will be over – my tears flow as I write, at the melancholy idea.' We feel certain that Jane's tears did not flow; though whether he made the offer, but refused to part with his Tom Jones coat, or did both and was rejected, we cannot say. Two years after this ball, we hear that he was engaged to another lady whom he shortly after married; and we hear of him again as a reminiscent old man confessing his boyish love for Jane Austen.

In the meantime Jane was in London, amid 'scenes of dissipation and vice,' whence to Rowling, dancing and visiting; here she writes home of two sons, 'who are to have one wife between them'; and a lady 'who belongs to the Black Hole of Calcutta.' About this time, her favourite brother Henry married the widowed Comtesse de Feuillide, whom, with the approbation of Warren Hastings, she took, as Lord Brabourne says, '*en secondes noces*,' though her junior by some ten years. She was, as Jane wrote of another woman, 'so much pleased with the state of widowhood, as to be going to put up for being a widow again.' Another brother, James, takes to himself a second wife – Mary Lloyd – to whom Mrs. Austen 'looked forward as being a real comfort to her in old age, when Cassandra is gone to Shropshire and Jane the Lord knows where.' In the course of the next year, Jane has been to London and is on her way back again, travelling through Sittingbourne, Ospringe, Rochester, Dartford; sleeping at the *Bull and George*; then on to Staines, Croydon, Clapham, Battersea. 'There were no adventures,' she writes, 'except the trunk had once nearly slipped off, and we

were obliged to stop at Hartly to have our wheels greased.' The only adventure is of other people's making, for it was during this journey that she missed her dressing and writing-box, of which so much has been surmised. Cassandra is now away, to whom she retails, among other things from Steventon, the information as to the woman who 'undertakes their purification and does not look as if anything she touched would ever be clean,' and as to the young couple whose 'prodigious innate love of virtue' was such, that they managed without keeping a servant of any kind. Also of the lady, who, 'happening unawares to look at her husband, took fright, and was brought to bed of a dead child some weeks before it was expected.' Here we have Jane Austen the novelist *en déshabillé*.

About this time we find again a vague atmosphere of another alleged romance. A Mr. Blackall is now the admirer. Tom Lefroy she had not forgotten, but of him 'she was too proud to make any inquiries.' Shorn of the embroideries woven around this episode by her nieces, who show a far greater warmth about their aunt's fame, as the dimness of their memories fades almost to vanishing point, we find no tragic halo surrounding any part of her life as to warrant any such conclusions, as some 'deep, silent sorrow,' or any 'paralysis of invention,' in any period of Jane Austen's existence. There may have been occasions for bitterness, but none for tragedy. The fact is, that when Jane was twenty-three years of age, she was shown a letter written by the above gentleman, the purport of which she communicates to her sister, 'that it would give him a particular pleasure to have an opportunity of improving his acquaintance with the Austen family . . . with the hope of creating for

himself a nearer interest.' On which she comments, 'that our indifference will soon be mutual, unless his regard which appeared to spring from knowing nothing of me at first, is best supported by never seeing me.' Fifteen years later she 'recollects with tender regard this piece of noisy perfection.' There is indeed nothing that gives us the impression of sadness in the above letter; this episode does not appear to have worried her overmuch if at all; she winds up by telling Cassandra, that 'housekeeping was her peculiar excellence, the chief merit in which was to take care to provide such things as please her own appetite.'

The Steventon chronicle goes on, filled with chatty home news, of what she bought, who were her visitors, and where she went. She buys six shifts and four pairs of stockings; she tells that they had pease-soup, a spare rib and pudding, of which elegant entertainment she was not ashamed to ask the doctor to sit down and partake. We know that they dined at half-past three, and drank tea at half-past six; that having felt the inconvenience of being without a maid so long they were determined to like her, and she would find it a hard matter to displease them. We know also that she went over to Deane to see her sister-in-law Mary, who had just been confined – the child by the way being the Memoirist – and was displeased by the untidiness of her appearance in bed and the thinness of her curtains. With so much doing, we can quite understand her impatience at times, in 'not wanting people to be very agreeable as it saved her the trouble of liking them too much.' 'Half her present stock of gowns she was tired and ashamed of, and even blushed at the sight of the wardrobe which contained them.' Withal, she did not forget the poor,

and gave a pair of worsted stockings each to three persons, a shift to one and a shawl to another. Really, in reading these letters, they appear to us like unrecorded portions of *Emma*.

Jane was not quite *twenty-four* years old when she accompanied her mother to Bath for a month; her brother Edward was already taking the waters there. Here she walks up Beacon Hill, and across Charlecombe; attends a grand gala in Sydney Gardens, and a concert with illuminations and fireworks. She meets one doctor, evidently an acquaintance, 'in such deep mourning, that either his mother, his wife, or himself must be dead'; and mentions another, who the day before 'was married to a lady and her three daughters.' She also gives Cassandra instructions that 'two o'clock on Monday was the last hour for receiving any commissions. The office is now closed.' Returning again to Steventon, she goes one day to Deane, another day to Oakley. Along with other interesting news items, we hear that her father's farm cleared three hundred pounds. Three weeks later she writes of a ball she had attended at Hurstbourne, and details amusing particulars of the people she saw. There was the broad-faced lady, with her pink husband and fat neck. Others had vulgar broad features, and one a good deal of nose. One had the jaundice, another was a queer animal with a white neck. There was also the gouty general. Even an accident had its good-humoured side. Of an acquaintance she says, that, 'getting off to lead his horse over a hedge, or a house, or something, his horse in his haste trod upon his leg.' That she helped her father in his parish duties we know, for about this time she witnessed a marriage and filled in the register with her own hand.

In answer to an invitation from her very dear friend Martha, to visit her at Ibthorp, she accepts, on the condition that she 'would be talked to, not to read or hear reading, as she could do that at home.' This visit would always be a memorable one to her; for returning two weeks later, she finds that her father had decided to retire from the Church and remove to Bath. What occasioned this somewhat hasty decision is not disclosed. Some of the relations suspected an attachment between the Austen sisters and the sons of Chawton Manor House; but apart from the fact that Jane in more than one instance teased Cassandra about this family, we have discovered nothing to confirm this suspicion. Like Fanny Price, it appears that they were 'totally unused to have their pleasures consulted'; or was it a 'medicinal project' upon the girls' understanding? That this change was decided and acted upon without consultation with Jane and Cassandra, who were away from home at the time, proves beyond a doubt, that if the health of the old people was bad, their will power was, to say the least, quite unimpaired.

When we consider, that only a few weeks before, they were suggesting improvements, 'for the reception of thorns and lilacs along the elm walk, and turning the new inclosure into a little orchard,' this sudden change does seem mysterious. We can only conjecture what must have been Jane's feelings. Though the 'Basingstoke assemblies had declined, and the balls thin,' there must have been some persuasion to reconcile her to this move, for, with her usual perspicacity, forebodings of their darksome future would certainly present themselves at every turn. Never before had Cassandra been absent for so long a period without a letter from her

sister. There is a gap of forty-five days, during which we know nothing. The letters, if any, were no doubt destroyed, and with the usual curiosity in such cases we ask, why? Was there some criticism or comment which Cassandra thought better suppressed? With the daughters away, we suspect some persuasive pressure had been brought upon the old people by their eldest son James, and more especially his wife, the Mary whom we have come to regard as the milder prototype of 'Aunt Norris.' James was his father's curate at Deane; a living of which Mr. Austen was himself patron and incumbent. To Mary, who was 'not a liberal-minded woman,' like 'Isabella Thorp,' 'four hundred pounds yearly was but a small income'; and to the enough of Deane, we surmise, was desired the little more of Steventon. We are confirmed in this opinion the more, inasmuch as henceforth the criticism of Mary, though veneered in jest, contains a great deal of truth. 'My father's old ministers,' writes Jane, 'are already deserting him, to pay their court to his son – and everything else I suppose will be seized by degrees in the same manner.'

Leaving Steventon, however, we consider, was the best thing that could happen to Jane. The smallest episode in the life of an artist may contain the germ of far-reaching changes. Lesser events have before now altered the course of genius. To a novelist every experience, however distressing, is grist to the creative mill. The observant mind will weave chapters out of moods, and cherish incidents that to others are unconsidered trifles. For an artist of Jane Austen's sensibility to leave the scenes of so much bliss without some regrets was improbable. We quite believe that upon being told

of this she fainted. We have known strong men commit a crime for less. To such moods we can attribute the touching departure of Marianne from Norland Park and Anne from Kellynch Hall. Jane's happy disposition, however, would soon triumph over such despondency. New scenes were visualised, fresh joys forestalled; 'prospect of spending future summers by the sea: delightful trips to Wales, and immediately, there was something interesting in the bustle of going away.' These are her own words. They even looked forward to keeping two maids, a steady cook, and a young giddy housemaid, 'with a sedate middle-aged man, who is to undertake the double office of husband to the former and sweetheart to the latter; no children of course to be allowed on either side.' Such were the innocent paradoxes Jane delighted in. Preparations were now being made for their removal, various houses and streets in Bath were inspected. Gay Street would be too high, Trim Street avoided, and Oxford Buildings were disliked. In the meantime, the Steventon property was being valued; the household effects dispersed, and the rest sold up. Two paintings on tin were at Cassandra's disposal; the 'old heterogeneous miscellany' go to James; the chests of drawers were not worth removing; the only necessary articles that would answer to send down were the beds. During this time, the father was doing all in his power to increase his income, and did not, so his daughter tells us, despair of getting nearly six hundred pounds a year by raising the tithes and other things. Jane facetiously objected to having 'generosity dictated to her as to her own belongings.' The household effects were appraised at over two hundred pounds; three cows, the tables and the pianoforte went for eighty guineas. Jane's books

fetched eleven pounds, a volume of Dodsley's *Poems* among them going for ten shillings; and the father's five hundred volumes were valued at seventy pounds. Meanwhile, our heroine was disporting herself in the usual manner, making farewell visits to her acquaintances. One day she dines at Deane; the next at Ashe Park; arriving in the evening before the party, she finds herself inadvertently shut up alone for ten minutes with the squire in the drawing-room: 'She did not move from the door, on the lock of which one hand was constantly fixed.' That the squire could make 'infamous puns,' we know; but he must have had the reputation of being also a naughty man, for Jane not to trust herself with him for a few minutes. She is at Deane again the next day; and on another attends a ball at Manydown, 'winding up,' as she says, 'four days of dissipation' by visiting a supposed sweetheart.

Amid these scenes of busy idleness it would be interesting to note that Jane's sailor brothers were circumnavigating the globe. Glimpses of their strenuous life at sea intersperse all her letters. Spain having allied herself with France, all England lived in fear of invasion, though one would never guess it from these letters. In the Navy discipline was severe, the food rough and very often uneatable; each ship's complement had many pressed men. The press gangs were everywhere. Jane's brother Francis, now a young lieutenant, was impressing men even on the Thames. In the *Seahorse* in Hamoaze, he saw the *San Josef*, and the Spanish line of battleships lately captured by the fleet under Lord St. Vincent. And again, in the *London*, he records the arrival of Nelson off Cadiz on his way to look for Bonaparte, whose fleet he encountered in Aboukir Bay and defeated

in the Battle of the Nile. And later, cruising off Minorca, he captures a French brig, and is blockading Genoa during the battle of Marengo.

Jane knew all this. Her other brother Charles, also a lieutenant, was at this time in the *Endymion*, from which he boards the *Scipio*, and with the prize money buys gold chains and topaz crosses for his sisters, as William Price did for Fanny. Shortly after this, he 'walks in on a Gosport hack,' to Steventon; and on the night that Jane 'drank too much wine at Hurstbourne,' he danced the whole evening, and like Willoughby, the 'next day was no more tired than a gentleman ought to be.'

Jane Austen had lived nearly *twenty-six* years in the world with very little materially to distress or vex her, though her ambition as an author was certainly far from being gratified. Thus far her pains were the only reward, and another ten years were yet to elapse before the fruition of her efforts. With the manuscripts of three large and several smaller works lying dormant in her desk, we can well imagine what her hope in the future would bring. We look upon the next one or two years as a kind of interregnum; years of suspended progress with no apparent growth; yet viewed as an artist she grew in these days like corn in the night. Casting aside the dross of youth and innocent revelry, she was ripening in the school of experience into mellowness.

Without the irresponsible gaiety, the serenity, the shelter of Steventon, her works would have lacked their perennial humour; that fun which permeates and buoys every mood. Without Bath and Southampton we should have missed that tincture of bitterness and senseful

solidity. Then comes Chawton, with its warmth and wisdom and mellow retrospective glow suffusing all she wrote. To the consummation of such an artist, these three periods were necessary evolutions in the development of *her* particular genius.

III

THE MIDDLE YEARS

THE sale at Steventon had not yet concluded. The clerical duties of the parish were given over to James. The family now make their departure for Bath, breaking their journey at Ibthorp for a few days. Unable to find a suitable home for the present, they stay at Paragon Buildings with Mrs. Austen's brother. Before three weeks had elapsed Jane had been to a ball, and attended one stupid party, where she saw an admiral 'whose legs were too short and his tail too long.' Viewing one house in the hope of residing there, 'the observations of damps, the reports of discontented families and putrid fevers, gave the *coup de grâce*' to any such hope. About the same time she tells her sister of her 'aunt's bad cough'; and asks her not to forget having heard about it. This is the aunt, by the way, in whom, along with Mary, Jane saw many of the traits she attributes to 'Aunt Norris'; a subject we shall deal with later. Before settling down at No. 4 Sydney Terrace, they spent the summer somewhere in Devonshire. After which, no doubt, they moved into their new home. In this house Mrs. Austen was for a time seriously ill, and celebrated her recovery by composing a few humorous verses of thanks. From here also, Jane goes on a visit to Steventon where she receives an alleged offer of marriage; and again to Dawlish, 'where the library was pitiful and wretched,'

and, it is said, to Teignmouth. About which time, Sir Egerton Brydges thought he saw her in Ramsgate.

Jane was as busy with her pen as ever, and during these intervals of visiting, we are certain that the serious business of her life was writing, and publication uppermost in her thoughts. In the spring of her *twenty-seventh* year, an MS. novel in two volumes, entitled *Susan*, was forwarded under the assumed name of Mrs. Ashton Dennis, to Richard Crosby and Son, London, for which she received the sum of ten pounds. Whether the publisher regretted this transaction we do not know; that he kept the work is certain, and many years later was honest and perhaps glad enough to offer its return for the same money, which offer was accepted. We thank him, however, for that ten pounds. Many have toiled long and laboriously for less – Probst gave Schubert only seventeen and sixpence for his G Flat Trio – but to a young lady of twenty-seven itching for some little recognition, it was a good round sum, and we are sure, it must have warmed her heart. To hold such a sum in her hand outweighed for the moment any opinion the publisher might hold as to the merits of the work. The ten pounds itself was proof enough of merit; a potion so sustaining added an ell to her mental stature.

In the meantime, the embryo of another work was in the making. That it was written at this time is inferred from the watermarks. It has some traits of *Emma*; but after the family around whom it was written, it was given posthumously the name of *The Watsons*. We understand that the first six pages are now in the Pierpont Morgan library.

We next find the family, together with Henry and his wife, on their summer holidays at Lyme. Here Jane

danced, visited, and bathed; to all readers of *Persuasion* a visit made doubly interesting by that one hour which she spent on the Cobb. In January of the year following, Mr. George Austen, 'whose tenderness as a father who can do justice to?' after a brief illness passed away. This was the first serious material loss which Jane had sustained in her life. The family now resided in Green Park Buildings, and though Mrs. Austen was pressed to remove to Steventon, for some reason she preferred to stay on a few months, and we find them later at Gay Street. Though Mr. Austen had still been nominally Rector, whether he had been able to increase his tithes sufficiently to bring his income up to six hundred pounds we are unable to say. This much is, however, certain, that after his death, the widow and two daughters were left in circumstances none too flourishing. Like the widow of a former 'Vicar of Highbury,' Mrs. Austen was a very old lady and together with her daughters, 'the quiet prosings of three such women' could do little to increase their slender incomes. In *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*, Jane Austen has expressed for us all the sentiments that such distressing prospects would occasion, with their consequent contraction of mind and sourness of temper. Only those who have been left high and dry in similar circumstances can appreciate their dismal forebodings. To others such feelings are vague presentiments. No mother or sister is certain of the attitude which their nearest kin will adopt in periods of stress. Luckily, Mrs. Austen had many sons, one of whom was very wealthy and the others comfortably off. Yet who can doubt that among them was one who had a wife with some traits of young Mrs. John Dashwood? Knowing Mrs. James Austen – though she it was who gained

most – we can almost hear her retorts behind the clerical bed curtains of Steventon: 'They will live so cheap. Their housekeeping will be nothing. They will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants; they will keep no company and can have no expense of any kind.' With an income of one hundred and forty pounds a year and Cassandra's thousand pounds, 'what on earth can three women want for more than that?' That Cassandra 'looked very poorly,' we know, and that Mrs. Austen had 'nerves,' we can quite believe. Like the ladies of 'Barton Cottage,' 'they gave themselves up wholly to their sorrow, seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it,' until 'each for the other resolved to be happy.' The future was certainly brighter. We are dealing with the present. Such passing ordeals as this, though unpleasant, make excellent copy for the novelist; and Jane Austen, no exception of the rule, utilised them to the full, and we can be certain without exaggeration.

In this mood Jane Austen, now in her *twenty-ninth* year, begins another work. If she had received ten pounds for one, though she laid aside another, she would try some new theme to bid for public favour, each time determined and hopeful that her efforts would find acceptance. Was the material too unyielding, or her genius as yet unripe, that she should lay several aside with no attempt at publication? This is a question we cannot answer. This last work, however, dealing with a subject entirely alien to her disposition, she left untitled; its name was chosen by her nephew as *Lady Susan.* Many and vague are the surmises as to this work. What was it that prompted this study and who was the original? There are traits of her cousin, the Comtesse, in 'Lady

Susan,' and of her brother Henry in 'Reginald de Courcy.' Also traces of this flippant though otherwise charming widow, bewitching a handsome gallant ten years her junior. Did the father admonish his son on the impropriety of near cousins of an age so unequal thinking of marriage? Knowing his fine character, he knew also his unsteadiness of purpose, and may have reasoned with him on the consequences of marrying the pampered widow of a guillotined French aristocrat. This, of course, is all conjecture. Henry married the Comtesse. She was loved by all the family, except perhaps the wife of James, who once feared her as a rival. Jane in particular was very fond of her. The only fear might have been, that her one time gaieties would lead them both to extravagances beyond their means, a fear not unfounded when, later, Henry's failure caused grave financial distress to most of the family. There was, however, nothing in common between the natures of the Comtesse and 'Lady Susan'; one was as innocent as the other was vile. We must look elsewhere for the hard outlines of 'Lady Susan's' origins. Apart from the watermark, the plot had in it elements of truth as told by a widow to her daughter and retold to Jane; and the widow dying at this time, gave her a theme and an opportunity of exploiting a new situation. Its marble-like coldness accorded with the sourness of her mood. In the bitterness of the period, a tincture of iron had entered her soul. It is the study of a woman damned. It lacked those charming touches tinged with humour which characterise her earliest and later works. Its callous maturity is beyond the age of *Love and Freindship*, and below the warmth of *Emma*. Having perused it again and again, one is amazed at the calculated

wickedness of this evil woman. That Goldwin Smith thought the 'plot worthy of a Parisian novelist,' we do not wonder. *Lady Susan* was written with the unerring hand of a mature mind. The plot was conceived and developed with her usual skill and invention. Had its dry bones been infused and clothed with the flesh and blood of *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, we can only surmise what kind of sinister masterpiece would take shape, like some female Heathcliffe or a Madame Bovary. This, however, was not to be, the coldness that impelled such a character was repulsive to the creator and chilled the mind that reared it. She fashioned the outlines of a woman whose sinister aspect, though rough hewn, could end only in something so monstrous, that her delicacy shrank from such an ordeal. The experiment was left in its crudity, but one has only to consider the eighty quarto leaves and one hundred and fifty-eight pages of this manuscript, all beautifully written, without correction or erasure, to find proof of the seriousness of her intentions. Judged by itself, apart from the fame that surrounds the great novels of Jane Austen, it has no intrinsic merit. It adds nothing to her literary stature and interests us only in extending the halo that encircles its author's personality; for as a psychological study of a phase in her life it is one of the most intriguing of all her works; and we thank the nephew whose courage was as great as his affection for giving it to the world.

In the meantime, to Mrs. Austen and her two daughters was added a friend, in the person of Martha, sister-in-law of their eldest brother and wife-to-be of Francis; her mother, the alleged prototype of 'Lady Susan's' daughter, had only recently followed Mr.

Austen to her grave. This welcome addition to the family gave a little more freedom to Jane. We find her in August of the same year on a visit to Kent; the parlour games are again resumed, she also visits Canterbury. Back once more in Bath, the 'fearful presentiment,' she once expected from Cassandra had happened, they had removed to Trim Street, a place Mrs. Austen one time assured her daughter she would do everything in her power to avoid. They did not stay here long, however; their five unhappy years at Bath came suddenly to an end, and, 'with happy feelings of escape,' they left their uncomfortable lodgings for Clifton, and a month later paid a visit to Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire. Jane was *thirty* years of age. Seldom had such scenes of splendour, of abundance and elegance, been her privilege to witness, as she saw at this seat in which her uncle had a life interest. In this mansion Charles I once received hospitable entertainment when the gates of Coventry were shut against him. It was so large that Mrs. Austen suggested 'setting up direction posts at the angles'; and so clean, 'that if you cut your finger, you could find no cobweb to wrap it up in.' Among the 'female insipidities and unprepossessing males in red coats' that graced the hall as in Trollope's Ullathorne Court, there was one exception of Charles I, by Van Dyck, painted over with flowers to protect it from Cromwell's puritanical fanatics; upon examination his unobserved eye was detected, peering through the petals. From this house, with its extensive pleasure grounds and deer park, Jane went to see the remains of Kenilworth and Warwick Castles. It is also surmised that she paid the promised visit to Hamstall-Ridware in Staffordshire, an invitation to which place she had once declined as

preferring to spend her summer holiday by the sea, to all her relations.

To hierophants of Jane Austen and her works, her five years in Bath are eloquent in incidents that fill one's memory like seeds in a sunflower. We cannot hope to emulate Miss Constance Hill's charming itinerary through this period, and to those who desire a closer acquaintance with Bath, and its influence on Miss Austen in her subsequent works, we know of no companionship more entertaining than that of the two Miss Hills. If in the mind of Jane Austen the great works were simmering, her brothers were at the same time making history as naval officers. Her letters give us the vaguest hints of events around which volumes have been written. If Bath in general seethed with excitement in these tense years, Jane in particular was the privileged harbinger of news, direct, as it were, from the cannon's mouth. Though she was busily engaged with her pen and needle, her brothers were equally busy in other ways. Frank was making experiments, and discovered that whitewash was the best preservative for coating cheeses against putrefaction at sea. We find him next as captain in a flagship, blockading Boulogne against the 'Tom Thumb egotism of the Corsican usurper and his two thousand flat-bottomed boats for invading England.' And later, he is in the *Canopus* under Lord Nelson, chasing Villeneuve to the West Indies. Shortly after this, ordered to convey a parcel of folk past Cartagena, he bitterly complained, that it was 'the most inauspicious day of his life,' as it cut him out from taking part at Trafalgar, and consequently his hope of a frigate from Nelson. On his return, he is introduced to the defeated Villeneuve; and surveys the scene in Cadiz Bay; the

'*Leviathan* fishing her main yard,' and the fighting *Téméraire*, with her fore and mizen-top masts gone. The Austens were at 'Trim Street still,' when Francis, in the *Canopus*, was fighting at St. Domingo. Charles, in the meantime on board a sloop, was on the watch for neutral traders, and searching for deserters on the North American station.

We must remember that in these years, if the fact that her brothers served in such important events did not give Jane, like 'Emma,' 'all the consequence she could wish for,' at least it was pleasant 'to receive everybody's congratulations.'

There is a silence of sixteen months, during which we know hardly anything of Jane Austen. Her genius was ill-suited to her present nomadic life, so tender a plant to flourish needs must have peace and a shady corner, and throve best when left alone and undisturbed in some quiet nook, screened from the burning sun and bitter blasts. Some years were yet to elapse before the season of mellow fruitfulness of Chawton. Why Southampton was chosen as their next place of residence we really do not know. For four women with slender means and no visible increment, to live in tolerable comfort, vulgar economy was a thing not to be despised. Margaret Dashwood's wish 'that somebody would give them all a large fortune apiece,' would have proved to the Austens a happy consummation indeed to all their troubles. One reason for choosing Southampton may have been the fact, that after the action of St. Domingo, their brother Frank decided to settle there with his wife for a time, and there may have been an expressed wish of their jointly keeping house. The Austens were for a time in lodgings,

and it is from here that Jane, 'easing her mind from the torments of rice puddings and apple dumplings,' finds time to write to her sister as to the termination of the family treaty and the comfortable state of her mother's finances. That Frank had been settling his accounts; though much increase of house rent would not do for either. We hear also that Mrs. James Austen does not talk of poverty now. Frank and Mary are choosing knives that will not cut, glasses that will not hold, a sofa without a seat, and a book-case without shelves. Mrs. Wylmot has another son, and Lord Lucan has taken a mistress, both of which events are of course joyful to the actors. Here was 'Emma' again at work.

They had now removed into a house in Castle Square, where Jane tells us, they were envied by many people. Frank was making some nice fringe for the drawing-room curtains, and Lord Lansdowne's domestic painter constructed a dressing-table out of a large kitchen table. In the garden also they could not do without 'laburnums rich and syringas ivory pure,' for the sake of Cowper's line. Jane meanwhile found time to read several books and once put five breadths of linsey into her flounce.

Another sixteen months pass, during which we have no knowledge of any letter. In fact, in three years we know only of six letters. We next hear of her in London on a visit to her brother Henry at Brompton. And later, leaving their uncomfortable quarters at the Bath Hotel, which was, she says, 'very dirty, very noisy, and very ill-provided . . . we drove, drove, drove and by six o'clock were at Godmersham,' where she stayed for three weeks. From here she details the usual news to Cassandra – that legacies are very wholesome diet – we were rather crowded yesterday – glad at not being

obliged to be an incumbrance to James – begs Cassandra to keep it to herself – of Mrs. James Austen being surprised at the Maitlands drinking tea with you, but that does not prevent my approving it – of Mr. Waller being dead, I cannot grieve about it, nor perhaps can his widow much – of a legacy making it feasible to accompany her brother to Kent at Christmas – a legacy is our sovereign good – and regrets at having no travelling purse of her own. We know also that she wore a boa, and that her kerseymere spencer was quite a comfort. She ends, however, by saying, 'I do not know where we are to get our legacy, but we will keep a sharp look out.'

Back again in Southampton, her visit 'seemed like a dream'; she takes mental notes of the human 'novelties produced' at a certain party, and like 'Emma' is busy planning 'matches.' She suffers for a time with earache, they also talk of removing to Alton. Before her next letter, however, the family are bereaved by the death of their brother Edward's wife on the birth of her eleventh child. Two nephews arrive from Winchester School to stay with their grandmother and aunts until after the funeral of their mother. With Aunt Jane they did not want for innocent amusement. They attend church the next day, and in the evening have Psalms and Lessons, and a sermon, after which they return to conundrums.

Edward now offers his mother the choice of a home on either of his two estates, which offer evidently delighted them. This really is the turning point in Jane's career. All her letters are now filled with 'little matters,' and breathe the happy mood of Steventon. Their approaching removal brings in its train an increase of amusement and a larger circle of acquaintances. They are as engrossed with Chawton as they were once with

Bath. Jane, as if forestalling her busy hibernation of the following years, enjoys to the full the remaining months at Southampton, and 'goes to as many balls as possible, that she may have a good bargain.' As far as we know, she danced no more in any ball-room after this. Going to one she tells us that, 'Fifteen years before, she danced in the same room, and felt with thankfulness that she was quite as happy now as then – but at present the melancholy part was, to see so many dozen young women standing by without partners, and each of them with two ugly naked shoulders.' She paid an additional shilling for her tea – did not gape until the last quarter of an hour; was asked by a gentleman for a dance; for which we thank him. Among much other interesting information we find – that marriage is a great improver – there are six bed-chambers at Chawton – that everybody has a right to marry *once* in their lives for love, if they can; – that she had two hands and a new thimble that led a very easy life – they had ascertained James's income to be eleven hundred pounds, curate paid, which makes us very happy, the ascertainment as well as the income – he means to keep three horses – that Charles is looked up to by everybody in all America – Yes, yes, we will have a pianoforte at Chawton – and hope to keep a manservant – also a wish that Sir John Moore had united something of the Christian with the hero in his death – they receive four brace of pheasants and a hare, also two hampers of apples; the floor of our little garret is almost covered. Who, indeed, after reading this recital, can doubt that in the daughter of a former Vicar of Steventon there was much of Miss Bates?

Jane Austen was in her *thirty-third* year. They had

intended leaving Southampton on Easter Monday; we find, however, that they did not do so, as a few days later Jane addresses from this place a letter to Messrs. Crosby, London, inquiring of that publisher his intentions as to a novel from her pen, purchased by him six years before. Presuming the same by some mischance to have been lost, she offers him a copy, and should no notice be taken of her address, would take upon herself the liberty of securing publication elsewhere. To which he immediately replied that there was no obligation on his side to publish, and should such be undertaken by anyone else, he would stop the sale, adding, 'The MS. shall be yours for the same as we paid for it.' Such are the rebuffs administered to obscure genius who sell the product of their brains on sale or return, hoping for one but not wishing the other. The circumstances surrounding this work are somewhat nebulous; the writer of the *Memoir* having unwittingly led all subsequent biographers astray in several essentials. Its evolutions are certainly interesting; first as *Kitty*, now as *Susan*, later as *Catherine*, and posthumously as *Northanger Abbey*. We sometimes think, that had it not been charmed by that master spell which 'Mrs. Slipslop' called 'ironing,' we doubt if any publisher, though he knew it to be work from the same pen as *Pride and Prejudice*, would have hazarded publication. Even Jane herself doubted its worth in the light of later days when placed beside the maturer products of her grand period. Catherine Morland, however, was the earliest love of Dr. Chapman; and he knew of one, 'not yet out of her teens who, returning to school, sat in a railway station and missed three trains under the enchantment of this work.' Indeed Macaulay, after reading this novel,

thought Jane Austen worth all Dickens and Pliny together. That *Susan* became *Northanger Abbey*, we have no doubt; her prefatory note to this later work tells us that it was disposed of during the Bath period and its return offered when she was about to leave Southampton.

To use the words of Austin Dobson's gentle raillery, but apply them to different persons, we are really not surprised that this 'Boeotian bookseller was constitutionally insensible' to the alleged charms of this immature work; but we should like to 'feel the bumps' of the immediate Austen progeny, to find the cause of their crass stupidity and doubting inertia as to the genius of their aunt, until fanned to flame by the admiration of others, when they themselves had all but forgotten the works, not to mention the sources of their inspiration, and almost the outlines of her very form. Apart from the letters, they tell us hardly anything we did not know before; they point us to few places we could not have found without their direction; and lead us often into surmises they could not substantiate. Though novelists themselves, the nephew and nieces of a master novelist, they knew little and mattered less. Unlike the ancient mariner, they were surrounded by drinking-water, but the little they gave us to drink does not quench our thirst. In fairness, however, we must say, that the grand-nephews and nieces have handsomely made up for their parents' apparent lukewarmness and nonchalance.

The family were now about to leave Southampton. The arrangement as originally planned was to leave on Easter Monday, sleep at Alton that night; spend the next week at Bookham and go afterwards to Godmersham. They hoped to be settled at Chawton by October,

so that Henry should have some shooting, and Edward would visit them after taking his boy back to Winchester. That this plan was not strictly adhered to we know. They took possession of Chawton Cottage in July of the same year. In fact, the first extant letter is dated 26th July, in which she congratulates her brother Frank on the birth of his second child, in verse. The opening lines we cannot forbear quoting:

> 'My dearest Frank, I wish you joy
> Of Mary's safety with a Boy,
> Whose birth has given little pain
> Compared with that of Mary Jane.'

IV

'SEASON OF MISTS AND MELLOW FRUITFULNESS'

We are now in a period, the most important in her life. Her long maturing genius ripened apace and blossomed with lushness. In seven years, six masterpieces were new created or re-created. Judged by the quality and polish of these works, we might say she emulated Balzac, Scott, Dickens or Stevenson, in sheer output and flush of composition. And when we compare the quarries from which these giants fashioned their creations to the bits of ivory from which Jane Austen so exquisitely carved her little miniatures, well may we wonder how, with material so attenuated, she gave us so much. We are indeed not surprised that during this epoch in her life there are intervals in her correspondence of over sixty months during which we hardly know anything of her intimate self.

Here beneath the roof of Chawton Cottage, on the cross-roads of Gosport and Winchester, she dwelt for seven years. A spot sacrosanct to all Janeites, as Gadshill to Dickensians, or Haworth House to those who love the Brontës. As Castle Street to worshippers of Scott, Nathaniel Hawthorne's home in Salem, or the Rue Fortunée to hierophants of Balzac, so is Chawton to all devotees of Jane Austen. Here she wrote, subject to every household intrusion, with long intervals of

solitude. We see her leaning over her dainty table – we think of Pater – scribbling above her little writing-box, that once she rescued from an inadvertent trip to Antigua. Pope from caprice wrote on the backs of used envelopes, and Jane, it is said, for convenience, chose bits of paper – though we doubt it – which from modesty she hid beneath a blotting-pad when warned by the creaking door of perhaps unwelcome entrants, who interrupted for a brief while the mystic process of composition.

Sense and Sensibility was now on the stocks, and no doubt, as upon another occasion, Jane was 'looking about for a sentiment, an illustration, or a metaphor in every corner of the room.' Reading carefully its opening chapters we can visualise, in its Barton Park and Cottage, the cottage she lived in and the great house she loved; the latter then occupied by a family named Middleton. We can see her pianoforte being unpacked and properly disposed of, like Marianne's; and Cassandra's drawings affixed to the walls, like Elinor's; also the eagerly awaited newspaper, which Squire Middleton may have sent them as Sir John, his namesake, was kind enough to send the Dashwoods. That Chawton Cottage, like the one in Barton, had 'dark narrow stairs and a kitchen that smokes,' we can quite believe, for in one letter she writes to her sister, 'Depend upon my thinking of the chimney sweeper as soon as I wake to-morrow.'

Here were spent the busiest and most fruitful years of her life. Though she had all the inducements to marry which 'Emma' had not, 'that very dear part of her – her fancy,' gave her little time to indulge in such thoughts. Back in Chawton she was really home again. Though Francis was now in China and Charles on the high sea,

James was within a morning's ride of his mother's home, and Edward, later, spent some time in his Hampshire house. To Henry's hospitable home in London Jane was welcomed with joy. Amid such scenes of tranquillity everything was congenial to her moods. With old Mrs. Austen, Cassandra, and Martha Lloyd, a maid, and probably the help of a man-servant from the great house, Jane now followed the primrose path of creation with a mind unharassed by the petty details of housekeeping, and in spite of untoward disappointments, abiding faith in her growing powers gave added zest to each endeavour for fame and for mending the family fortune.

She had not been at Chawton above nineteen months when at the age of *thirty-five*, *Mansfield Park* was begun, and a few months later *Sense and Sensibility* was ready for the printers. Writing at this time from Sloane Street, London, to her sister – her letters as usual revelling in checked muslin, green crewels, bugle-trimming, and silk stockings – she was not too busy to think of *Sense and Sensibility*, to place which was the ostensible object of her visit; in fact, she says, 'I can no more forget it than a mother can forget her sucking child.' She was correcting two sheets, the last of which only brought her to Willoughby's first appearance, and Henry, her brother, was hurrying the printer. This was in April; she hoped that it would be out by June. From a note of hers, 'that the incomes remain the same,' it is presumed that some friends must have found fault with the novel as to the great wealth of its hero. In the meantime, Jane was enjoying herself. If 'John Dashwood' took his son to see the wild beasts at Exeter Exchange, Jane in person visits the Liverpool Natural History Museum in Piccadilly, and the British Gallery in Pall Mall. She had the good

fortune also to be present at a grand party given by her brother and his wife. The lordly company numbered sixty-six, and it took two hackney coaches to convey even the musicians. 'The festivities began with a pair of fine soals,' and the music opened with 'Poike de Parp pirs praise pof Prapela,' which humorous family code when deciphered is said to mean, 'Strike the harp in praise of Bragela.' During this visit, like Mrs. Jennings and Elinor, Jane walks one fine Sunday in Kensington Gardens. And another day, 'the horses actually gibbed on this side of Hyde Park Gate,' when on their visit to the D'Entraigues, whose pictures delighted Henry. Jane saw nothing to dislike in these elegant people, apart from their taking quantities of snuff; and must have known, though she does not mention it, that Monsieur the old Count had once been deputy for the *noblesse* in the States-General, that he had become estranged from Mirabeau, also that his wife was the only woman ever known to have inspired Bonaparte to break forth in verse. That Jane was not insensible to politics we know, for, in one letter of this period, she congratulates her brother Edward in rhyme on the Weald of Kent Canal Bill having been put off till another session, 'against wicked men's will.'

After a month in this 'scene of so much dissipation,' she pays a short visit to friends at Streatham, and before the end of May is home again in Chawton, where she finds the chickens all alive, the young peony just blown, the columbines in bloom, looks forward to the shrubbery border being gay with pinks and sweet williams, and predicts a great crop of Orleans plums. She would not say that Cassandra's mulberry trees were dead, but was afraid they were not alive; and the detection of an

apricot on one of the trees gave her a few lines for *Mansfield Park*. Though the letters are so few, it is surprising how much we know of the little sensibilities of Jane Austen, from those feminine touches unchanged throughout the ages. Thunder she did not like, and sat upstairs with blinds drawn and candles lit during one such storm. We know the characteristics, mental and physical, of her callers and those whom she called upon, especially those with flowers in their heads and music at their finger tips; or short ones not quite straight, with some impediment of speech, such as not being able to pronounce their Rs. Writing to Cassandra, she says that 'Fanny may talk till she is black in the face about using only twelve pounds of tea in twelve months'; thought it 'horrible to have so many people killed,' the battle of Albuera having just been fought. Receiving a set of wedgwood ware that had been decorated with rather small leaves, she humorously suggests, 'that in such a year of fine foliage, the woods about Birmingham must be blighted.' There is also a letter from Cassandra to her niece about this time, begging her not to mention that Aunt Jane wrote *Sense and Sensibility*. We can imagine Jane's excitement, when a month later, October in fact, this work was published and printed for the author by Egerton, the only work of hers printed at her own expense. Expecting a loss, she had even laid by a sum to meet such a contingency, which happily did not arise.

Apart from our knowing that in June of the following year she spent, along with her mother, a fortnight at Steventon, where no doubt she added a few wisps to the character of 'Aunt Norris,' there is a gap of eighteen months without a single letter to illumine what must be

a crucial period in her creative life. On 29th November of the same year, within a few days of her *thirty-seventh* birthday, writing to Martha Lloyd concerning *Pride and Prejudice*, she says that, 'Egerton gives one hundred and ten pounds for it. I would rather have had one hundred and fifty, but we could not both be pleased, and I am not at all surprised that he should not choose to hazard so much.' Did she know that this very letter would one day be sold by auction for the record price of one thousand pounds, what would she have said? In January of the following year, in the course of one of her letters to Cassandra, she announces, 'I have got my own darling child from London – the advertisement is in our paper to-day for the first time.' *Sense and Sensibility* had been published at 15s., for *Pride and Prejudice* she wanted 18s., and was going to ask 21s. for her two next, and 28s. for her stupidest of all. Such were the humorous intentions – not fulfilled – she formed in the excitement of holding *Pride and Prejudice* in her hands. The work having arrived a few days prior to the advertisement, half the first volume is read aloud the same evening. Though on the whole well satisfied enough, she had some fits of disgust. She thought Elizabeth as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how she could tolerate those who would not like *her* she did not know. Having lop't and crop't it so successfully she imagined it must be rather shorter than *Sense and Sensibility*, but apart from a few errors in not making the dialogue immediately clear, and a printer's blunder of making two speeches into one, the work in her opinion was rather too light; it wanted shade and a little stretching out here and there with a long chapter of sense, or solemn nonsense about something unconnected with the

story. Her sister's praise, however, gratified her, and that of her niece delighted her; that she liked Darcy and Elizabeth, it mattered not how much she hated the others. So much for *Pride and Prejudice*. In the meantime, she was busy on *Mansfield Park*; and while reading Sir John Carr's *Travels in Spain*, discovers there was no Government House at Gibraltar, so corrects this error in her novel by altering it accordingly to the 'Commissioners.' She is next engaged in looking out for copy for the ordination of 'Edmund Bertram.' And also, for reasons we surmise, more jocular than serious, asks Cassandra to 'discover whether Northamptonshire is a county of hedgerows.' Being applied to at this time as to the oath taken in former times of Bell, Book, and Candle, she passes on the inquiry to Cassandra as more able to give the information. This was in February. Her brother's wife, the one-time Comtesse, died in April, and a month later he visits his mother and sisters in Chawton, shortly afterwards taking Jane in his curricle back with him to London. With her head full of 'Bennets' and 'Bingleys' she goes to the exhibition in Spring Gardens, and hoped to see Sir Joshua Reynolds' paintings in Pall Mall. While at the exhibition she was particularly pleased with a small portrait of 'Jane Bingley,' but there was no 'Elizabeth Darcy'; she supposed that 'Mrs. Bingley's' favourite was green and 'Mrs. Darcy's' yellow.

As Henry was in deep mourning they did not go to the theatre, but parading about London in a barouche, 'she liked her solitary elegance very much'; and anticipated later going to Windsor on their way to Henley, 'which will be a great delight.'

Returning home after this short visit, she puts the

last touches to *Mansfield Park*, which she finishes soon after June. Her brother Edward was at this time staying at Chawton Great House for a period of six months – such visits always delighted Jane – and we glean from her niece's pocket book (the only information we have) of interesting conversations and delicious mornings together; of walks to Alton, of reading *Pride and Prejudice* with Aunt Jane; and that, 'The Cottage dined here – we dined at the Cottage.'

Her brother Frank, in the meantime, was in the *Elephant*, protecting transports of Swedish troops to be landed in Swedish Pomerania, to defeat Marshal Oudinot and drive back Napoleon from Leipzig. Writing from Chawton, she asks, 'If the ghosts of Gustavus Vasa and Charles XII, Christina and Linneus rise up before you?' and tells him that 'every copy of *Sense and Sensibility* is sold; it has brought me one hundred and forty pounds, besides the copyright, if that should ever be of any value; I have therefore written myself into two hundred and fifty pounds, which only makes me want for more.' She asks his permission to mention the *Elephant* in *Mansfield Park*, at the same time telling him she had already done so; and ends her letter by hoping that he continued to brush his hair, 'but not all off.' This was in July. By September, she was again in London, staying with Henry at Henrietta Street; 'Arriving,' as she says, 'at quarter-past four, we set off in a coach to the Lyceum at seven; were home again in about four hours and a half, had soup and wine and water, and then went to our holes.' Though her 'delight in the play was very tranquil,' she goes again the next evening to Covent Garden; she also complains that her eyes are quite tired of dust and lamps, and had heard,

'that the stays now, are not made to force the bosom up at all, that was a very unbecoming unnatural fashion.' Within a few days she is in Kent, having spent only two days in town, and expected to stay at Godmersham about two months, shaking off all vulgar cares in the happy indifference of East Kent wealth, with no occasion to think of the price of bread or meat. Thanking Frank for his permission to mention the *Elephant*, and the kind hint that followed it, she tells him that 'People shall pay for their knowledge if I can make them'; also that there is to be a second edition of *Sense and Sensibility*. To Cassandra she details the usual small talk, commenting with frankness on the people and things that interested or bored her. Of the comfort of a billiard table which drew all the gentlemen away, especially after dinner, leaving Edward, Fanny, and herself the delightful quiet of the library. She wonders if the ink bottle has been filled, and if bread is not lower. Her niece Fanny shares one letter, and writes of one, Will Amos, who lives in a barn at Builting, 'who said the fleas were so starved when he came back from Chawton, that they all flew upon him and *eener'most* eat him up.' It was during this visit that Jane sets off in a chair with her brother to Canterbury, and visits a gaol. She also discovers from one of Crabbe's prefaces that he was probably married. And on one occasion sat alone with five tables, eight and twenty chairs, and two fires all to herself. Going to Chilham Castle, she found many *douceurs* in being a sort of *chaperon*, and was put on the sofa near the fire and could drink as much wine as she liked. Leaving Godmersham along with her brother and niece in November, they journey on to Wrotham, and two days later went to Henry's house in Henrietta

Street, where Cassandra was already on a visit. What her movements were for the following three months we cannot tell. All we know for certain is, that in December she would be *thirty-eight* years old, and that *Emma* was begun on 21st January. In March she again leaves Chawton along with Henry, spending a night at Cobham. Taking with them *Mansfield Park*, they did not begin reading till Bentley Green; Henry taking most kindly to 'Lady B.' and 'Mrs. Norris.' 'Places were secured at Drury Lane, where Kean was taking the town by storm.' Saw a musical thing in three acts at Covent Garden, also *The Devil to Pay*. Spent one morning shopping and seeing the Indian Jugglers; the same, no doubt, whose dexterity once made Hazlitt feel ashamed of himself. She 'wore a gauze gown, long sleeves, and all – trimmed her lilac sarsenet with black satin ribbon – and had seen nobody in London with such a long chin as Dr. Syntax, nor anybody quite so large as Gogmagoglicus.'

There is a gap in the letters of another three months. From Fanny's diary, however, we hear that in April, 'Aunt Jane drank tea at the Great House,' and that one day they spent a bustling hour or two shopping at Alton. *Mansfield Park* was published in May – the first work wholly of Chawton origin – with no tradition whatever. The next letter, dated June, is written from Chawton, and interests us insomuch as it tells of a visit to her godfather, the rector of Little Bookham, whose wife, she says, 'admired *Mansfield Park*, exceedingly . . . and the manner in which I treat the clergy delights them very much.' Jane had passed this way many times, and, as *Emma* was now in course of serious preparation, we have no doubt that in the back of her

mind, the towns and villages in this neighbourhood were the composites from which Highbury and its environs were delineated. At Alton, Cobham, and Little Bookham, she saw 'the stray letter-boy on an obstinate mule . . . the butcher with his tray . . . two curs quarrelling over a dirty bone . . . and a string of dawdling children round the baker's little window, eyeing the gingerbread.' The 'minced chicken and scalloped oysters' may have been memories of Stoneleigh; the 'delicate fricasse of sweetbread and some asparagus' were dishes perhaps dear to Henry's French cooks. The 'Old Abbey Fish Ponds' were reminiscent of those her nephews delighted to drag at Godmersham; and the 'strawberry beds of Donwell' which enraptured Mrs. Elton so much, were probably shades of those at Chawton Great House. In one letter, she writes to Cassandra, who was then in London, to take care of herself and not get trampled upon in running after the 'Emperor' – of Russia, who with the King of Prussia was at the time visiting England.

About this time, as an example of her patience, we cannot help but note her loving kindness as an aunt, in reviewing and criticising the MS. of a novel by her niece, Anna – half-sister to the writer of the *Memoir* – though both were very busy; the one about to be married, the other writing *Emma*. Aunt Jane finds time to read this novel aloud to Grandmamma Austen and Aunt Cass; and gives Anna the benefit of their joint opinion on the work. Really, these letters are some of the most illuminating, as without them we should never have known that she 'did not like a lover speaking in the third person.' 'That a country surgeon would not be introduced to men of rank'; and that 'Aunt Cass does not

like desultory novels.' By the end of August Jane is again in London, this time at Hans Place, having gone up by coach, 'four in the kitchen part, and I was told, fifteen at top'; which reminds her of her own coach – in *Love and Freindship* – that Philippa's husband drove from 'Edinburgh to Stirling.' We thought, however, of Nicholas Nickleby, in less favourable circumstances, on his way to Dotheboys Hall.

This visit could not have lasted very long, as Henry talked of being at Chawton by 1st September. With *Emma* absorbing the whole of her attention, she had certainly much to think of, and we are not at all surprised when, a little later, she somewhat complainingly tells Fanny, 'I can command very little quiet at present.' In the course of September she again reverts to Anna's novel; takes the liberty of expunging certain phrases, praising some things, and warning her against others; is delighted with the exquisiteness of her names, and hates some of her expressions. Her criticisms in these letters are indeed invaluable, as in them we have the key to her methods of composition, a subject we shall deal with later.

Meanwhile, the family were again bereaved by the death of a third sister-in-law, this time the wife of Charles, whose children, Jane once remarked, were too Palmery in feature – their mother's maiden name – especially little Cassy, of whom her Aunt Jane was very fond, and one time wrote her a letter backwards, beginning with 'Ym Raed Yssac.'

The Anna mentioned above was married on 8th November to Ben Lefroy at Jane's old church at Steventon, and what with the trials of housekeeping and child-bearing, the novel was shortly after her marriage put aside and later burnt.

There is one incident which we cannot forbear touching as affecting Jane's interest in, and close acquaintance with her nieces at this time. About the middle of November, she receives a parcel, purporting to be music, inside which was a letter from her favourite niece Fanny. Fanny, it appears, had fallen in love with a young man of high character, and estimable in every way; but his religious opinions were so puritanical, that she, though 'profoundly religious' herself, was so 'plagued about Methodism' it upset her peace of mind, and determined her to dissolve the intimacy. Aunt Jane, of course, was her only confidant in this affair, hence the secrecy with which the information was conveyed. From criticising the novel of one niece, she is asked for guidance in the love-making of another. Indeed, these letters to Fanny are among the most beautiful things she wrote, and stand beside her novels for fullness of sense and the sentiment they breathe. She pleads this young man's 'uncommonly amiable mind and strict principles, whose only fault seems modesty'; is even 'persuaded that they who are evangelicals from reason and feeling, must be the happiest and safest,' and condones his lack of wit by saying, 'that wisdom is better than wit, and in the long run will certainly have the laugh on her side.' In the course of which interesting letter we find that *Mansfield Park* is sold out; and that her brother Henry 'wanted her to come to town to settle about a second edition, and unless he urges it, shall not go. I am very greedy, and want to make the most of it.'

A few days later, writing to Anna, who now resided at Hendon, she exhorts her to make everybody in that town admire *Mansfield Park*. That she *did* go to London is certain, for by the 28th of November she had seen

Miss O'Neil in *Isabella*, and anticipating a good cry, had taken two handkerchiefs, but had little occasion for either. Then follows a visit to the newly-married couple at Hendon; the bride's 'purple pelisse,' so she writes to Fanny, 'rather surprised her . . . and the twenty-four guineas they are to throw away on an instrument, they will wish in the shape of sheets and towels six months hence; and as to her playing it never can be anything.' Here to be sure, we have again a little touch of the 'Emma' side of Jane. Somehow we cannot help feeling that her brother James's family were not wholly in the good graces of Aunt Jane. 'Anna,' she once wrote, 'inherits something of madness, more from her mother's family than from ours . . . an Anna sent away and an Anna fetched are different things.' After this Hendon visit, Jane was pleased that 'Anna had the *power* to ask me to come again.' We hear later, that 'Ben and Anna walked here last Sunday . . . she looked so pretty, it was quite a pleasure to see her, so young, and so blooming, and so innocent, as if she had never had a wicked thought in her life, which yet she must have had if we believe the doctrine of original sin.'

If two weeks before she was pleading the desirableness of Fanny making it up again with her young man, by the end of the month she was inclined the other way. Fanny, it seems, like 'Isabella Thorpe,' liked him 'well enough to marry, but not well enough to wait'; and Aunt Jane must have agreed with her when she wrote that 'nothing could be compared to the misery of being bound without love – bound to one and preferring another.' Of *Mansfield Park*, she says, 'it is not settled yet whether I *do* hazard a second edition . . . people are more ready to borrow and praise than to buy, which I

cannot wonder at, but though I like praise well enough, I like what Edward calls "Pewter" too.'

Anna must have sent her another packet of MS. to review, which she acknowledged from Hans Place early in December, in which she tells her, 'that nieces are seldom chosen but out of compliment to some aunt or another. I daresay Ben' – Anna's husband – 'was in love with me once, and would never have thought of you if he had not supposed me dead of scarlet fever.'

Jane Austen had passed her *thirty-ninth* year when we hear of her again. However busy her brother Charles must have been, watching for Greek pirates in the Archipelago, Jane was equally as busy maturing the fifteen-months wonder child of her brain. On 29th March *Emma* was finished. Though many letters were written, they evidently do not exist; for nine months there is not a word. *Persuasion* was begun on 8th August. On 4th October she is off again to London, accompanied by Henry, who was paying his mother and sisters a visit. Ostensibly this journey was in connection with the publication of *Emma*, which for some reason was this time to be published by the House of Murray, who offered, it appears, through Henry, less money for the copyright of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*, than Jane had received for the very moderate edition of *Mansfield Park* alone. We are glad to learn, however, that William Gifford, reader to John Murray, had nothing but good to say of *Emma*; for which praise we pass over Hazlitt's statement that he was 'the invisible link that connects literature with the police.'

It was during this visit that Henry was taken ill with a bilious attack. Though not too ill to further the interests of *Emma*, he is, as Jane says, 'Calomeling'; but

on 22nd October he becomes suddenly worse, and Jane alarmingly dispatches expresses to her brothers and sister; before a week had elapsed, however, Henry was out of danger. During the early period of his illness he was attended by an apothecary, a Mr. Haden, and from Jane's playful allusions to this gentleman, we presume that she was very fond of his companionship. He was 'our precious . . . a sort of wonderful nondescript creature on two legs, something between a man and an angel, but without the least spice of an apothecary . . . who brought good manners and clever conversation.' Later, another physician was called in, which led to a most interesting interlude in the life of Jane Austen. Coming thus in contact with our heroine, he discovers that she was the author of *Pride and Prejudice*; and knowing the Prince Regent's partiality for her works, 'that he read them often and even kept a set of her works in every one of his residences,' he was highly delighted to meet their author. He even informed the Prince, who in turn instructed his librarian, the Reverend J. S. Clarke, to wait upon her and show her any civility in his power, which resulted in Jane being shown over the library and apartments of Carlton House, and given permission, if she so desired, to dedicate any future work to his Royal Highness; which she did by so inscribing *Emma*, then in the printer's hands.

Mr. Clarke, not satisfied with this, in the course of further pompous epistles, suggests to our heroine, that 'in some future work she would delineate the character of a clergyman, like Beattie's *Minstrel* . . . as neither Goldsmith, nor La Fontaine in his *Tableau de Famille*, had done so to his mind . . . and describe him,' says he, 'burying his own mother, as I did. . . . Carry your

clergyman to sea as the friend of some distinguished naval character about the Court – you can then bring forward, like Le Sage, many interesting scenes of character and interest.'

Having a few months later been appointed Chaplain and Private English Secretary to the Prince of Coburg, he again advises Jane, 'that any historical romance illustrative of the history of the august House of Coburg, would just now be very interesting, and that she may choose to dedicate the volume to Prince Leopold.'

Her replies to these letters are models of humorous restraint and delightful modesty. 'The comic part of the characters,' she writes, 'I might be equal to, but not the good, the enthusiastic, the literary. . . . A classical education, or at any rate a very extensive acquaintance with English literature, ancient and modern, appears to me quite indispensable for the person who would do justice to your clergyman; and I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress. . . . I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or at other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way, and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other.'

In about a month from the commencement of his illness, Henry is convalescent. *Emma* was now in the printer's hands, and Jane felt vexed and disappointed

by the delay in supplying her with proofs, as she expected to leave London early in December. The printers, it appears, were waiting for paper, and blamed the stationer. She complains to Mr. Murray, from whom she received a most civil note in reply, after which the printers continued to supply her so well, that in a week's time she writes, 'I am advanced to Vol. III, to my *arra*-root, upon which peculiar style of spelling there is a query in the margin.' A letter to Mr. Murray telling him of the Prince Regent's permission to dedicate, brought from him a fine compliment in return. We hear also that the weather at this time was exquisite, she enjoyed it 'longitudinally, perpendicularly, diagonally.'

From a letter to the publisher on 11th December we find that *Emma* was to be advertised for publication on the following Saturday; and besides giving final instructions as to the wording of the dedication, she subjoins a list of those persons whom she wished to receive the work, among them Maria Edgeworth.

Jane celebrated her *fortieth* birthday in Hans Place, and the following day was on her way back to Chawton.

During this, the last year of her life, several things converged to cloud and disquiet her ever happy disposition. First came the excitement of publishing *Emma*, after fifteen months of hard work and none too prosperous expectations. Too much perhaps has been attributed to her anxious vigil over Henry's health; his bankruptcy we think caused her much greater distress. And now again she was busy on *Persuasion*. All this must have sapped the vitality of any person more robust in constitution than this frail maiden lady could boast to be.

Flattering reviews and private encomiums of her work,

may have mollified to some degree any resentment she may have felt; but could never compensate her pressing desire for 'Pewter.' Though she lost only thirteen pounds in her brother's bankruptcy – part of the small sum she had certainly earned by *Mansfield Park* – had she received for her works one-half she deserved, deserved and desired even more than Frances Burney, she could have raised the family finances beyond the need of that 'wholesome diet of legacies,' which they were doomed *not* to receive.

In reply to John Murray, on his lending her a copy of the *Quarterly Review*, in which appeared an article on *Emma*, Jane finds nothing 'to complain' of her treatment in it, except in the total omission of *Mansfield Park*. Sir Walter Scott, the writer of the article, before many years had passed, praised as exquisite in *Pride and Prejudice*, what at first he found ridiculous and tiresome in *Emma*. For this much, however, we thank him none the less. It is enough for us that he deigned to notice her at all, when in the height of his fame; it is proof of his genius, his discernment and his magnanimity to the lesser lights of his day.

Of the warm appreciation of Lady Morley, to whom she had forwarded a copy of *Emma*, 'It encouraged her to believe that she had not yet overwritten herself.'

When she went to London to negotiate for and correct the proofs of *Emma*, she was apparently in perfect health, and enjoyed the 'muggy weather' in all phases. In the following March, Henry was declared a bankrupt; many of his family suffered, a few of them severely. To Jane in particular it must have come as a great shock. It was a blow to her sensitive nature and keen family pride. To one who, like 'Anne Elliot,' 'had

feelings for the tender, spirits for the gay . . . and patience for the wearisome,' Jane secretly grieved for Henry in this disaster, more perhaps than Henry did himself. Visions of London, with its gaieties and welcome respite from arduous toil, which she had enjoyed through her brother's hospitality, would now be recollections only. The sober restrained tone of *Persuasion* reflects the mood of a happy disposition chastened by the tenderest introspections. The chatty gaiety of *Emma* is refined into the pensive meditations of a reminiscent 'Anne,' now 'all fortitude and gentleness.'

Henry's distress, however, was short lived; that from a bankrupt banker, he chose to become a country curate, shows not only an easy conscience, but also the elasticity of his temperament and the versatility of his accomplishments.

In the meantime Jane was not her old self. She was ill, and the change was noticed by her friends. Jane Austen was consumptive. The most lingering of diseases, and to the sufferer, that of hoping longest when to others her existence was fleeting and all hope had gone. In May, together with her sister, she was at Cheltenham for three weeks, breaking the journey at Steventon and Kintbury. These little trips during the process of creating one novel or another, must have been welcome in more ways than one; they served the double purpose of relaxation and of supplying her with apposite copy for the work on hand. In spite of her indisposition, *Persuasion* went on apace, and on 18th July she writes 'Finis,' at the end of the first draft. Not satisfied, however, with the concluding chapters, she changes entirely the declaration scene between Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliott; with what improved

results a perusal of both efforts is a most interesting study. Our only regret is – indeed there is little in the new to compensate for its loss – that she should not have found place for Wentworth's long pent and passionate declaration of his love. 'Still, a little nearer and a hand taken and pressed, and "Anne, my own dear Anne!" bursting forth in all the fulness of exquisite feeling – and all suspense and indecision were over.' There is nothing more charming in all her canonical works. By 6th August, almost twelve months from the date it was begun, *Persuasion* was finished, the last of her great novels.

Meanwhile, she had spent a day in Alton, but was, as we understand, far from well, though none realised how seriously. Mrs. Austen, who had been ill, went for a short holiday with Cassandra to Cheltenham. 'Thank you,' writes Jane on 16th September, 'my back has given me scarcely any pain for many days. I have an idea that agitation does it as much harm as fatigue, and that I was ill at the time of your going, for the very circumstances of your going; I am nursing myself up now into as beautiful a state as I can.' In the absence of her sister, she longed for a few days' quiet exemption 'from the thought and contrivance which any sort of company gives . . . composition seems to me impossible with a head full of joints of mutton and doses of rhubarb.'

It is surmised that about this time, the *Susan* of thirteen years ago was recovered; and her '*Plan of a Novel*, according to hints from various quarters,' was written: a satirical epitome of various suggestions inspired, no doubt, by the vanity of the Prince Regent's librarian, as it contains many of the sentiments he had expressed.

She is now *forty-one* years old – her last birthday – on which date we find her writing to her nephew, Edward, that his 'Uncle Henry writes very superior sermons,' and suggests purloining a few for their novels. In this same letter she writes of the little bit of ivory, two inches wide, 'on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour.' On 23rd January she writes to her niece, Caroline, that she felt herself getting stronger than she was six months ago, and can perfectly walk to Alton or back again without the slightest fatigue, and hoped to do both when the summer comes. The next day she writes to a friend that she understood her case now so much better, as to be able by care to keep off any serious return of illness, and was convinced that bile was at the bottom of it all; at the same time asking her for the receipt of some excellent orange wine she had once tasted. Three days after writing this letter – on 27th January – she begins another novel, now known to us as *Sanditon*. That she was seriously ailing at this time, there can be no doubt; but with the usual buoyancy of spirit that accompanies this disease, the mind draws to itself some excess of strength, while the body weakens and droops as the days go by. There are few complaints. No fine phrases halo this period. It is possible that, like Keats, she felt the flowers growing over her, and tasted death already on her tongue, as did Mozart. Three kindred minds, of kindred beauty, pining in body with a kindred disease. To know her works, is to wonder at the vitality of such an intellect; that a brain so perfect could operate at all, while the organs of respiration and digestion were being sapped by some insidious and painless erosion, which slowly and surely undermined her constitution. Even

her last work shows no sign of drooping spirits; begun in her usual firm and neat hand, some of the later pages were first traced in pencil and afterwards written over in ink; her mind, however, never faltered.

Jane Austen could not be idle; if she relaxed from one work it was but to take up another; even in the intervals of drafting her last novel, she busied herself with various projects. *Miss Catherine* was being revised, 'but for the present is put on the shelf.' *Persuasion* was being polished. The last sentence of *Sanditon* was penned on 18th March. On the 23rd, she writes of *Persuasion*, that it was 'ready for publication and may, perhaps, appear twelve months hence.' We cannot understand this long delay, unless her poor health forbade the excitement that such an event occasioned. Withal, we have some idea that during this time she also derived some amusement from tabulating the varied opinions of her critics on *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*.

Lord Brabourne noted in his mother's pocket-books, the receipt from 'Aunt Jane' of thirty letters in the last three years of her life, only five of which he could find. This is indeed a distinct loss to Austen literature, as Fanny inspired some of Jane's most delightful letters. 'If I live to the age of Methuselah,' wrote the aunt once, 'I could never accomplish anything so perfect.'

From the few that remain we glean hints of her illness. 'Aunt Cassandra nursed me so beautifully . . . I am almost entirely cured of my rheumatism . . . Just a little pain in my knee now and then, to make me remember what it was and keep on flannel.' Before the end of March, she says, 'I am tolerably well again, quite equal to walking about and enjoying the air, and by sitting down and resting a good while between my walks,

I get exercise enough . . . and as the weather gets more spring-like, I mean to take to riding a donkey . . . I certainly have not been well for many weeks, and about a week ago I was very poorly. I have had a good deal of fever at times, and indifferent nights, but I am considerably better now and am recovering my looks a little, which have been bad enough – black and white and every wrong colour. I must not depend upon being very blooming again. Sickness is a dangerous indulgence at my time of life.'

Of *Persuasion*, she writes, 'You may *perhaps* like the heroine, as she is almost too good for me.'

On 24th March she took her first donkey ride and liked it very much.

Another untoward event was now pending, and the expectation of it, she says, 'keeps us in a worry, your grandmamma especially, she sits brooding over evils which cannot be remedied, and conduct impossible to be understood.'

Her forebodings were confirmed, for on 28th March her Uncle Perrot – her mother's brother – died at Scarlets, leaving everything to his wife, and subject to her life interest, a large sum to Jane's eldest brother James and his heirs; also a thousand pounds each to his sister's children who should survive his wife. Though he lost ten thousand pounds in Henry's bankruptcy, that he should single out James and his family for his heirs, and leave his sister – Mrs. Austen – with nothing, and only a thousand pounds each to Jane and Cassandra, and that, only after his wife's death, was indeed unforgivable. That the three women, his old widowed sister and two celibate and forlorn nieces, were sad and chagrined we can quite believe.

There is indeed no wonder that the shock of her uncle's will brought a relapse. 'I am so ill,' she writes, 'that I could not but press for Cassandra's returning after the funeral. . . . I am the only one of the legatees who has been so silly, but a weak body must excuse weak nerves . . . I have been suffering from a bilious attack attended with a good deal of fever.'

The passing over of her mother in the will was excused by the thought that her uncle looked forward to surviving her. 'That her younger children had more, and all her children something immediately,' was all the old lady wished; she was then seventy-eight years old.

'Immediately.' There's the rub! Had Jane and Cassandra received their legacy at once, how much more generous the gift would have been. What an acquisition of wealth in their present narrow circumstances, and Jane's increasing ill-health.

About this time she made her will. 'To my dearest sister, Cassandra Elizabeth, everything of which I may die possessed . . . fifty pounds to my brother Henry and fifty pounds to Madame Bigeon. . . .'

In these lines there is something to us most poignant.

That there was a certain unexplainable ill-feeling against her brother James's family – more particularly Mrs. James Austen – we have no doubt; and the fact of their being the chief legatees on this occasion did not improve matters – a feeling common to human nature even in the most affectionate families, when one receives so much and the others so little. Though James or his family, like the rest, received nothing immediately, the fact that the mother was entirely overlooked must have occasioned an ephemeral bitterness which they could not help showing, though they strove to hide. In these

circumstances we can quite understand their reluctance to accommodate their niece Caroline – then only twelve years old – during her parents' absence arranging the dead uncle's affairs. Jane was certainly ill, but the family were so visibly upset, that the presence of James's daughter at this time would be very embarrassing.

On 13th April Jane was again seized with a feverish attack, and was obliged to take to bed, which she kept 'with only removals to the sopha' until 22nd May, on which day she writes one of her most characteristic letters to Miss Sharp, at one time governess to her niece Fanny, and a frequent correspondent whose 'sweet flattery' gave Jane much pleasure. By the courtesy of the owner, this letter was published by *The Times*, as an extremely interesting account of Jane Austen's last days; which it certainly is. Among other things, she says, 'I can sit up in bed and employ myself, as I am proving to you at this present moment; and *really* am equal to being out of bed, but that the posture is thought good for me. . . . My head was always clear, and I had scarcely any pain, my chief sufferings were from feverish nights, weakness, and languor. This discharge was on me for above a week, and as our Alton Apothy did not pretend to be able to cope with it, better advice was called in. Our nearest *very good* doctor is at Winchester, where there is a Hospital and Capital Surgeons, and one of them attended me, and *his* application gradually removed the evil. The consequence is, that instead of going to town . . . I am going to Winchester instead. . . . On Saturday next I am actually going thither – my dearest Cassandra with me, I need hardly say. . . . The journey is only sixteen miles, we have comfortable lodgings engaged for us . . . and are to

have the accommodation of my elder brother's carriage. . . . Now that's the sort of thing which Mrs. J. Austen does in the kindest manner! But still, she is in the main *not* a liberal-minded woman. . . . Mrs. J. A. has had a much shorter confinement than I have – with a baby to produce into the bargain. We were put to bed nearly at the same time, and she has quite recovered this great while. . . . I have not mentioned my dear mother; she suffered much for me when I was at the worst, but is tolerably well. . . . In short, if I live to be an old woman I must expect to wish I had died now, blessed in the tenderness of such a family, and before I had survived either them or their affection. *You* would have held the memory of your friend Jane, too, in tender regret I am sure. But the providence of God has restored me – and may I be more fit to appear before Him when I *am* summoned than I should have been now! Sick or well, believe me, your attached friend.'

Never was a letter penned, fuller of hope, tenderness, or divine resignation than the above.

On 24th May Jane, in her own words, 'a very genteel portable sort of invalid,' bade her last good-bye to her mother and home. Accompanied by her sister in the carriage, she was attended by her brother Henry and William Knight, riding on horseback in the rain.

Arriving at that compact and stately little house overlooking the dominie's garden, her illness increased with the lengthening days. Hope vied with gloom, playfulness alternated with despondency, and wit rippled with death attendant at its elbows. On 27th May, she could write, 'I am now out of bed from nine in the morning to ten at night, I eat my meals in a rational way, and can employ myself, and walk from

one room to another. . . . Mr. Lyford says, he will cure me, and if he fails, I shall draw up a memorial and lay it before the Dean and Chapter, and have no doubt of redress from that pious, learned, and disinterested body.' Those around her, however, had not much hope. A few days later she even goes out in a sedan chair, and hopes to be 'promoted to a wheelchair as the weather serves.' In her weakness, she brooded over the will, and could not shake it off. In her heart, she fancied that this disappointment had checked her recovery. 'But,' says she, 'I am getting too near complaint, it has been the appointment of God, however secondary causes may have operated.' By 6th June, 'her case is desperate . . . with such a pulse it was impossible for any person to last.' The last stage of dissolution was at hand. The process is epitomised in her niece's pocket books.

14th June. 'A sad account of my poor dear Aunt Jane.'

18th June. 'Another hopeless account from Winchester.'

29th June. 'Much the same account of dear Aunt Jane.' Yet on 15th July, almost the eve of death, she takes her pen in hand, and writes six humorous verses, the first of which we quote as an example of her perennial cheerfulness.

'When Winchester races first took beginning,
'Tis said that the people forgot their old saint;
That they never applied for the leave of St. Swithin,
And that William of Wykeham's approval was faint.'

At half-past four on Friday morning, 18th July, Jane Austen was dead. Cassandra and Mrs. James Austen

were present at her bedside when she died. To her niece Fanny, whose amusing letters gave 'Aunt Jane' such enjoyment, Cassandra sent the 'affecting particulars' of her last moments.

'During the last eight and forty hours, she was more asleep than awake . . . she felt herself dying about half an hour before she became tranquil and apparently unconscious. During that half-hour was her struggle, poor soul! She said she could not tell us what she suffered, though she complained of little fixed pain. When I asked her if there was anything she wanted, her answer was she wanted nothing but death, and some of her words were, "God grant me patience, pray for me, oh, pray for me!" Her voice was affected, but as long as she spoke she was intelligible. I hope I do not break your heart, my dearest Fanny, by these particulars; I meant to afford you gratification whilst I am relieving my own feelings. I could not write so to anybody else; indeed you are the only person I have written to at all excepting your grandmamma . . . I sat close to her with a pillow on my lap to assist in supporting her head, which was almost off the bed for six hours . . . a slight motion of her head with every breath remained almost till the last. There was nothing convulsed which gave the idea of pain in her look; on the contrary, but for the continual motion of the head she gave one the idea of a beautiful statue . . . fatigue made me then resign my place to Mrs. J. A. for two hours and a half, when I took it again, and in about an hour more she breathed her last. I was able to close her eyes myself, and it was a great gratification to me to render her those last services . . . her dear remains are to be deposited in the Cathedral. It is a satisfaction to me to think that they are to lie

in a building she admired so much; her precious soul, I presume to hope, reposes in a far superior mansion. May mine one day be reunited to it.'

On Thursday, 24th July, Cassandra watched the little mournful procession the length of the street. 'Everything,' she says, 'was conducted with the greatest tranquillity. Never was human being more sincerely mourned by those who attended her remains than was this dear creature. She was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow.' As the church service began at ten o'clock, the burial must be over before that hour. They laid her within the walls of Winchester Cathedral, which she had loved so much.

'Jane lies in Winchester – blessed be her shade!
Praise the Lord for making her, and her for all she made!
And while the stones of Winchester, or Milson Street remain,
Glory, love and honour unto England's Jane!'

KIPLING.

V

OUTLINES

Please start it at once. It is so late.

On first reading the letters of Jane Austen, we were inclined to agree with Sir Leslie Stephen, who pronounced them as trivial. We found indeed, very little of consequence to tell. With such slender threads to guide us, there was hardly a skein about which we could weave an imaginary romance; and nothing left us, but to paste up panegyrics at her door. We were mistaken. Each perusal brought something new to light. The essential Jane stood before us as few authors ever have. There is no writer whose intimacies are so much our intimacies; with whose simple unostentatious way of life we appear to be quite and wholly familiar. The novelist lay unadorned beneath a cloak of homeliness. To know the works of Jane Austen, is to know the lady herself in all her varying moods, and the letters give us those glimpses of reality that confirm our prior surmises. Her works, though fashioned for fiction, are chronicles from life, to us equally as real; all her characters are familiars; we know them, Jane knew them, Cassandra knew them. More letters are missing, perhaps, than have come to light, but sufficient remain to keep us busy for many a day, rummaging for hypothetical prototypes amidst the crowd of acquaintances she has made 'familiar in our mouths as household words.'

Though her sky was not cloudless, such serenity

reigns, that all we can say is, How beautiful! There is hardly a wisp upon which to hang the usual themes that make biography thrill. To all but the Austen household, Jane's life and Jane's work were things apart; to us, however, they are inseparable and all important. In both, the woman stands out pre-eminent. Reading her letters you would never surmise the masterpieces she wrought. Her thoughts are all taken up with what Soames Forsyte calls 'ribbondry.' They teem with all the commonplace trivialities which Addison analysed as the contents of a coquette's heart. The artist is shrouded beneath the happiest of naïve domesticities. Every line bespeaks the genus woman. The topic of every other sentence is a cap or a gown; a birth or a match; there is 'a dead baronet in almost every letter.' The snug Chronicles that season the charming simplicities upon which 'the daily happiness of private life depends, was one of the first gratifications of each.' Though she did not pine for fame, disappointments she certainly must have had. The weather may have been too hot, or too cold; her visitors too frequent, the cooking tiresome; her dancing partners too few, her means too scanty; but of yearnings and regrets there is hardly a word. In her life you will find no plot, no intrigue, no romance, no tragedy; no peg upon which to hang even the rumour of scandal. The few flights with which Jane indulged her girlish fancies were mild and abortive. She was a genius without its kindred flaws and frailties.

We know of no woman who came nearer the seven virtues which 'Miss Bingley' pronounced the cynosure of female perfection. If Jane, according to her nephew, 'was not highly accomplished,' then really, the word is a misnomer as far as we understand it. And along with

the improvement of her mind by extensive reading which 'Mr. Darcy' added, as something more substantial, Jane *was* accomplished indeed. Even without the additional testimony of her brother Henry, a careful perusal of her letters and works will prove her knowledge of all literature to be wide and deep.

A recent writer, however, found her 'grammar slipshod,' and her 'language as that of a woman of insufficient reading.' His labour must have been prodigious, but it does not 'determinate' the case he set out to prove. That they are interesting we admit, and are certainly less dreary in reading than any formal classification could be. Had he taken the same pains to discover the extent of her reading, as he did to amass instances of her alleged grammatical anachronisms, his conclusions would have appeared superfluous. As to Jane Austen, the question is What books had she not read? To surmise from her works by making an anthology of their defects, that she read little, is the greatest praise one can give of her apparent detachment from the world of books and of her unaffected knowledge. The theory, that to be well-bred, without being well-read, implies a disability to write well, is something quite novel to us. John Bunyan was not well-bred, we certainly never thought him well-read; but the fact that the great Macaulay strove to catch his style, is proof enough to us that he wrote well. Yet to-day, Dr. Jacks cites evidence from *Pilgrim's Progress*, that Bunyan had dipped in the *Faerie Queen*, and, like 'Don Quixote,' had even read *Amadis de Gaul*. When Jane Austen wrote to the Prince Regent's librarian, 'boasting herself to be with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress'; she was but

repeating the sentiments placed by Richardson in the mouth of 'Harriet Byron.'

From comments we have read, one would think that Jane, like 'Fanny Price,' was 'prodigiously stupid'; to know both, is to know that such is far from being the truth. We presume that as in that library of Michael Johnson, all literature was well represented among those five hundred volumes which George Austen was known to possess. We hear also that he was a 'profound scholar.' Though he read Cowper to his family after breakfast, alone in his study he may have dipped into Petrarch, into Anacreon, and Hesiod; and possibly, like Archdeacon Grantly, amused himself with the witty mischief of 'Panurge.' Was not Rabelais a brother prelate? In those long and quiet Steventon nights, it is certain, that his daughter would have found them all out. Jane was no epicure as to her reading. The artless simplicity of her creations required nothing very erudite. Had she read less, could she have given us better novels? Had she read deeper, would she have written as she did? That her reading did aid her in writing, is true; but that she would have written better had she read more, we doubt. She achieved such perfection, that our only interest in what she read is not to discover the sources of her inspiration – sources that lay within her dim self – so much as to find the processes that helped in the gestation of her genius. Such is her genius, that we might say, she wrote from the breast and read before she could walk. She thought pen in hand, and read more for amusement than instruction, and as the vehicle of expression was hers from the cradle, she had but to jot down her impressions to complete the circuit, and the novelist was in being. 'Most people,' says Clemence

Dane, 'are born with a heart and develop a head; but Jane seems to have arrived intellectually complete.'

There was no self-consequence in this family of great novel-readers. Jane knew the 'topography of every blot and dog's ear' in Richardson and Burney. Though in possession of a great many books, they bought, borrowed or exchanged many more; were members of book societies, and subscribed to more than one circulating library. Indeed, Jane was proud that others should imitate rather than initiate their example. Like her own Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe, we might say, 'They shut themselves up to read novels together.' Books of travel mingled with history, grave essays with lighter effusions of ephemeral fictionists; classic tales with books of poetry, old sermons with the newest novels. At times they were 'quite run over with books,' and provided they were all story and no reflection, like the old maids of *Quality Street*, they had a 'decided partiality for romance.' If what she read did not teach her how to write, they taught her what to avoid, and from her comments, we learn many of her foibles. We know her likes and dislikes, and what disgusted her. Knowledge of books was the passport to her friendship and the acid test of consequence in her novels. We know of no novelist who laid in a greater store of general intelligence to point a letter or adorn a book. She read history through the eyes of Shakespeare, and could classify events as Polonius did plays. As a child she loved the Stuarts and hated all their enemies; Henry VII was a 'monster of iniquity'; Richard III, 'a very respectable man'; Henry VIII abolished religious houses to improve the landscape of England; Elizabeth was 'a disgrace to humanity.' Her comments on books are equally

entertaining. The 'thousand improbabilities' of one, the 'indelicacies' of another: one was foolish, and the language of another had such warmth, could it affect the body, it might be worth reading in cold weather. She 'detested a quarto' and preferred an octavo. She read one by candlelight, and mended her petticoat after another. Her familiarity is such, that persons and books have no distinction. 'We are now in Margiana' – 'The American Lady improved.' Her letters teem with references to books. 'I am looking over' this; 'We have got' that; and because she did not like evangelicals, was disinclined to read another. Those whom her characters extolled, we can take for granted that Jane extolled also. The poets were her especial favourites. 'Shakespeare was part of an Englishman's Constitution.' She loved Crabbe and Cowper, Thomson and Scott, Montgomery and Wordsworth, Campbell and Byron; Dodsley and Burns, even though 'he is always on fire.' She preferred a speech embellished by Hume to the genuine words of historical characters; and was disgusted that a mere anthologist should be eulogised, while her favourite novelists were under-valued.

It may be said that the writings of George Sand are reflections of a mind saturated with Rousseau, Chateaubriand and Byron; and that the works of Jane Austen are the quintessence of Richardson, Burney, and Crabbe. From their lives such conclusions may apparently be inferred, but when dealing with an author's works such reasoning often proves fallacious. Morley thought George Sand the loveliest prose writer that ever lived; and Madame de Staël, reading one of Jane Austen's novels, found it *vulgaire*. The curiosities of literature furnish numerous examples, that the mind of man does

not blossom according to the seed implanted. Art and nature upset most interesting inferences. The wasp is a ferocious insect, and the placid Empusa an ascetic, though the first lives on honey and the second thrives on flesh. George Sand, *le demi-monde*, the polyandrist, gave us one or two delicate masterpieces, and Jane Austen the vestal, in one, drew the lineaments of a wanton woman more insidious than *Madame Bovary*, with none of her redeeming graces. A valetudinarian like Pope wrote *The Dunciad*; and an innocent like Emily Brontë created a monster. A dean wrote *The Tale of a Tub*, and a truant like 'Poor Noll,' *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Tolstoy wrote like a Christian, though he once lived like a rake. Rabelais, steeped in divinity, oozed ordure and nectar; filth lies cheek by jowl with the highest morality. Hardy, the ascetic, wrote *Jude the Obscure*, and from the same mind that fashioned *Robinson Crusoe*, issued *Moll Flanders*. The lavender and the mustard seed are both tiny grains that feed and flourish on the same gross earth: one distils a perfume and the other yields a condiment. The mind of man, however, is a crucible that sometimes extracts poison from nectar, and sometimes sweets from carrion. In art it is the crucible that matters, not the appetite or what it feeds on. The character of a man's writing has no more to do with his reading than his temperament can be gauged from what he feeds upon.

If to know the classics is to be termed learned, then Jane pretended to no such knowledge. Apart from one humorous allusion that some verses of hers were 'purely classical, just like Homer and Virgil, Ovid and *Propria quae Maribus*,' we are convinced that she knew little Latin and less Greek. We could never picture her

rushing on the slightest pretext to Sophocles and getting excited about blind old Œdipus, like George Eliot. And we feel certain that Aurora never surprised her in bed reading the *Medea* of Euripides, as Flaubert once confessed. Of this we are almost sure. But she wallowed in romances as 'Don Quixote' did in books of chivalry. She feasted on necromancers and horrid mysteries, on warnings and orphans, on midnight bells and forests, on monks and black veils, on castles and on rivers. In this world of horrors, is there any wonder that 'Catherine Morland' was 'lost to all worldly concern'? We are surprised that she kept her head at all. Jane had read them all; she even parodied Hawkins Brown's *Address to Tobacco*, and no doubt knew the contents of Dr. Finni's *Pamphlet on Cowpox*, which she mentions as beguiling some of her friends. All knowledge came beneath her purview, from the Hebrides to Spain; even the military police interested her. When in London she enjoyed the same variety in theatre going. One night it was *Shylock*, the next *Tartuffe*; once she went to see *Clandestine Marriage*, and another time *Midas*. Saw also scaramouch and a ghost, and 'revelled in *Don Juan*, that compound of cruelty and lust,' whom she 'left in hell at half-past eleven.' Saw Kean, and 'could have sworn at Mrs. Siddons for disappointing her.' Though she was correcting *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Mansfield Park* was on the stocks at the time, we can be sure that all this play-acting helped her in blending *Lovers' Vows* into the latter work.

That she read French we know. Apart from what her nephew has told us, her autograph, together with Cassandra's, was discovered recently on a compilation of little French stories, dialogues, and dramas, in a

Swansea library. Jane was twenty-two years old when she wrote her name in this work; about which time she offered to detail Henry's *History of England* to her friend Martha, if she would in return repeat to her the French Grammar. Was this the work from whence she had derived her knowledge of 'Galagi de Concini,' the favourite of Maria de Medici; and of the 'Doge at the Court of Louis XIV,' whom her own Mary Crawford felt like, in the parsonage shrubbery? From a ponderous sentence in *Emma* we know her acquaintance with Madame de Genlis' *Adelaide and Theodore*; and from a letter written at the sedate age of forty, we find that she 'could not read *Olympe et Théophile* without being in a rage,' and that she had just lent the first volume of *Les Veillées du Château*. Her early and lasting acquaintance with her cousin, the Comtesse de Feuillide, must have inspired her wish for greater proficiency in that language. Indeed her novels early and late are dotted with French expressions that show more than a passing acquaintance, by the familiar assimilation to which she puts them.

From the same source we know also that she knew something of Italian.

That she had some knowledge of the law and lawyers is certain. Her interest in legacies was so pressing, and her brothers' properties so wide, that it brought her into contact at one time and another with various legal matters, not always pleasant.

Her 'Arcturus and Cassiopeia' is our proof that she was not ignorant of astronomy; and from the fact that she recommended a book with her fingers to a deaf acquaintance, we know that she must have known also, the rudiments of dactylology.

Who can say after this that Jane Austen was not

highly accomplished? That her mental diet was far less prudish than we have been led to believe, is proof enough for us, that you cannot always infer from the works of an author the books she has read. From them we surmise a great deal and from her letters more, but they are so few. From the first to the last, a period of twenty-one years elapses, and the gaps between each group – during which we know very little of her intimate self – amount to about fifteen years. Her sister Cassandra, rightly or wrongly, has robbed us of this pleasure, by committing to the flames what, she thought, was not meant for mankind. We admire her modesty and faithfulness, but regret the act. Knowing so little – and yet so much – we itch for more, and thus deploring the deed, we cannot altogether praise her wisdom.

Jane Austen, who knew English, no one better, read French and translated Italian. She who smattered in law and astronomy, who danced and played, and conversed with the deaf, who read such books and wrote such novels, knew also mankind, both rich and poor, in country villages and London town, in mansion and cottage, in inn and parsonage. The banker in Charing Cross and the squire in Kent, the lady in Bath and the manorial lord. Lived amid the same countryside as enraptured Gilbert White, and saw the self-same scenes, but not with the self-same eyes, that Hogarth engraved for our delight. Saw London, as Kean and Mrs. Siddons, as Hazlitt and Lamb saw it, when Paddington was a field. Went to the Lyceum and Covent Garden. Rode in solitary elegance around Hyde Park and walked through Kensington Gardens. Saw the Indian jugglers, and stood in the self-same porch, beneath which Bernard Shaw discovered his 'Elizabeth Doolittle.'

Before her eyes passed coquettes in plenty and beaux not a few, their hearts and heads awaiting dissection under the gentlest of satirists in a far-off Hampshire village. She who had revelled in the sensations of Mrs. Radcliffe, and the imitations of her satellites; who had steeped her mind in the immaculate novels of Richardson, and glowed in the fashionable romances of Frances Burney, admired Maria Edgeworth, and adored Scott; had, indeed, seen and read almost everything needful to fill the cornucopia of a novelist. That she read Fielding we know, her knowledge of 'Tom Jones's' white coat could not have been hearsay; and from her familiar use of the word 'Yahoo,' we presume also that she was acquainted with *Gulliver's Travels*. She knew also of 'Dr. Syntax' and 'Gogmagolicus.' That she gave a quotation, 'as opposed to Voltaire,' and knew the pompous priggish 'Dr. Pangloss' in *The Heir at Law*, may we not assume her acquaintance with 'Candide's' tutor? If 'Uncle Toby's annuity' gives us the clue to *Tristram Shandy*, and one word to Daniel Defoe, there may be phrases in the missing letters that would lead us to Cervantes and Smollett. If she had seen *Tartuffe*, she may have dipped in Montaigne; if Goethe's *Sorrows of Werther*, why not Schiller's *Robbers*? If the 'fooleries of Kotzebue' had left their trace in *Mansfield Park*, then perhaps Klopstock, unless he was 'too evangelical,' may have been one of her favourites. That she had read so many books of German and French origin, what might we not surmise from her knowledge of Italian? We know enough, however, to prove beyond any doubt that Jane Austen had a richer tooth than many imagine, and that her knowledge of literature, if not as deep as a well, or as wide as a church door, was sufficient in all phases and

dimensions to adorn the most charming mind in letters, and enrich our language with a few of its brightest jewels.

That Jane was no beauty we admit, at least not handsome in the sense that 'Fleur Forsyte' was, 'with the pick of youth at the beck of her smiles.' We could hardly say of her what she herself said of 'Harriet Smith.' Neither in the other extreme can we conceive her as painted by the prejudiced friend of Miss Mitford; as 'the most perpendicular, precise, taciturn piece of single blessedness that ever existed . . . no more regarded in society than a poker or a firescreen.' From the portrait we know best, she looks out upon us as a prim, prudish, pert little Miss, in kiss-curls and cap, short sleeves and yoke, with large benignant eyes, a roguish smile and dainty chin. To see her in those 'pink shoes and cloak too handsome to be worn,' see her as 'Valentine Brown' saw 'Phoebe Throssel,' or as Tom Lefroy saw her on the night she 'exposed herself for the last time' at the Harwoods' ball, those were the days to glimpse Jane Austen. Jane's beauty, we think, as in the majority of her sex, was a matter of dress. The Comtesse Feuillide had heard that Jane and Cassandra 'were perfect beauties, and two of the prettiest girls in England.' Another cousin, however, found Jane 'whimsical and affected, not at all pretty, and very prim, unlike a girl of twelve.' We do not think the beauty or otherwise of a child any criterion whatever of the woman to be. When Egerton Brydges saw her, he 'thought her fair and handsome, slight and elegant, but with cheeks a little too full.' And her nephew said, 'her countenance had a peculiar charm of its own.' This is the portrait of Jane Austen we love to visualise, though as we suspected, 'She and her sister took to the garb of middle-age earlier

than their years or looks required'; in fact, they would be considered 'dowdy.' We think sometimes that Barrie, when he conceived the old maids of *Quality Street*, had the Austen sisters in mind; or was it the Misses Brontë? We do not think Jane's taste in dress, though it monopolised the greater part of her small talk, was of the best. Her figure, we fancy, had something about it which eluded that final touch, which some women so unconsciously assume, while others strive in vain to catch. Or was it lack of means, or a disinclination perhaps to be considered foppish? To be the youngest daughter in a family where the boys alone counted, had its drawbacks. Money was none too plentiful. The father's income was of necessity doled out with a sparing hand. Twenty pounds a year as pin money for a woman with literary aspirations left little to spend on dress, after dispensing charities. And what could not be manufactured at home was often spoilt by the local seamstress. What she bought could not be 'much perfection,' and the seven-and-a-half yards of cambric muslin to make a gown for a tall woman – which she commissioned Cassandra to buy – was a luxury not often ventured on. How many girls would succeed if the 'success of their principal hopes depended on operating on a hat with Japanese ink,' as Miss Austen was obliged to do? Though, as she said on one occasion, 'an artist can do nothing slovenly,' we are afraid that the material she worked upon was too cheap to achieve distinction. She was a bargain hunter. Never obsessed with dress, as the years roll by, she took less pride in her person – 'her vanity lies another way' – other matters of much greater purport to us, occupy her mind. Unlike Jane Welsh, who decked her hair in all its curly glory, to

Jane Austen, 'beyond washing and brushing, hair-dressing was a torment – the long ones she plaited out of sight, the short ones she cut to avoid papering,' and hid all beneath a perpetual cap. Morning, noon and evening, she was seldom seen without a cap. Even in London she wore a cap; 'peak in front and large full bows of old twopenny ribbon.' If her own was too 'nidgetty,' she would borrow a cowl from Cassandra and put in a 'coquelicot.' Once she accepted a 'pretty style of hat' from her sister-in-law. If the artificial cherries and grapes were too dear, she would go in quest of a 'cheap shop.' At one ball she wore her aunt's gown and handkerchief; and on another occasion, to save mourning, she reserved for herself 'Cassandra's stockings and half the velvet.' That the barber at Godmersham only charged half-price for cutting her hair, she says, 'He certainly respects either our youth or our poverty.'

Such were the innocent subterfuges Jane had recourse to, that she might be passing fair. That she was not poor, we know; that she was by no means rich we are certain. We have the feeling at times, that she moved among her wealthy acquaintances with the humility and submission of a poor relation. With the subdued glow of genius burning like a vestal flame within her, she would be more than human, if in her heart she did not yearn for a little more of that worldly wealth and fame that was her just due; if only, like George Eliot, to help her relatives, and to make the little triumvirate of women less dependent on the bounty of her brothers. Though she has now risen to distinction, we must not forget that in life she was obliged to be contented with obscurity.

All who knew Jane Austen vouched as to her sweet

temper. Her brother Henry said it was as polished as her wit. Her nephew bore witness to her charm; and all admired her good sense. Without in any way detracting from the natural panegyrics of her family, we do not at all agree that she was the placid individual that people have surmised her to be, who, knowing so little of her real self, have read her works in a spirit reflected from the prevalent insipidities that surround the apparently colourless existence of a country clergyman's daughters. To them, her novels, 'though elegant in style,' like Blair's sermons, 'are as even as a bucket of warm water.' As they found them tame and flat, they concluded that Jane herself was equally so. Little do they know her character who think so. Far from being temperless, she had all the harmless feelings, foibles, and caprices inherent in her sex which charm could render innocuous. Full of sense, she could never suffer fools gladly, and had an eye the most observant to other people's natural and affected weaknesses; all of which was as paint to the palette of such a mistress of derision. In fact, George Saintsbury thought her 'insatiable and ruthless delight in roasting and cutting up a fool' superior to that of Addison's, in that it was more restrained and well-mannered. That Jane 'never said a sharp thing' we really cannot believe; we know better. To her nephews and nieces, even to her many sisters-in-law, she was certainly complaisant and kind; who is not? She may have erred in public, like 'Emma'; who has not? If she did not have the 'dignity of an ancient saint,' like Trollope's Archdeacon, in her *robe de nuit*, and the privacy of her letters, all the sharp things were confided to Cassandra; between them we can be sure were dissected the dignified prototypes of the

persons that she hid behind the anonymity of her novels. We forgive Emma her lapse into rudeness and Marianne her impatience at the over-indulgence shown to the pampered Middletons, but we should like to know what prompted the novelist's rather callous animadversions over the 'fat sighings' of Mrs. Musgrave for her dead son. Jane Austen abhorred solemnity, and resembled Yorick in her invincible dislike of gravity. To Cassandra, she unmasked her thoughts of persons and things in the plainest language with sisterly liberality. In fact, she unbends herself with such innocent *naïveté*, that it is a delight to those whose knowledge of her is only derived from her works. The endless amusement that such letters gave to Cassandra, we can only surmise; and that she allowed them to exist unexpurgated, is proof that she considered harmless the reproofs and drops of bitterness that are pointed with so much humour. From them we are glad to find that Jane could be a rebel. Her sturdy independence is apparent. A few sharp things she may have written, but an uncharitable act we are sure she was incapable of doing. She was but human, and we must allow her the privilege of saying a few nasty things in the sanctum of her correspondence without thinking any the worse of her. In fact we admire her all the more. They are, after all, but very small drops in a sea of good-natured gossip.

The spirit of fun permeated the Austen family. In the women especially, its warm glow suffuses every letter. If the Duke found sermons in stones, these ladies saw humour in everything. In so large a family and so small a neighbourhood, many were the 'scenes of triennial bliss' in this clerical household, over the foibles of parishioners and the inconsequential nothings so dear to

the heart of woman. The old lady must have been very amusing. Her weakness being for noses, such an organ would certainly lend itself as a subject for her playful rhyming and sparkling conversation. Her own nose, it appears, was quite an aristocratic one. She once wrote some humorous verses after an illness in gratitude for her recovery, entitled *Dialogue between Death and Mrs. A.*; we have read also her verses to rhyme with 'Rose.' Cassandra, however, according to her sister, was the 'finest comic writer of the age.' Her ingenious *Essay on Happy Fortnights*, and the *Talobert Skin*, which furnished Jane with so many jokes, together with the letters which diverted her so much that she could have 'died of laughter,' are all evidently destroyed.

Lord Brabourne has given us one spoonerism, 'a chutton mop,' and two abbreviations such as 'too clerge' and 'too ronge,' as happy expressions prevailing among others used in those days. Playful nonsense and gentle raillery were the keynotes of Jane Austen's letters. Having, as she says, 'attained the true art of letter-writing,' to Cassandra, she 'talks as fast as she could' throughout her correspondence. In health and sickness Jane was the embodiment of cheerfulness and good humour. She had indeed, like Elizabeth Bennet, 'pleasure in many things.' Her mind, like her needle, never rusted for want of employment. Few could be more entertaining than Aunt Jane. If we believe her literally, we would say that she 'tippled' at times; one morning after the night before, she humorously tells her sister, that her hand was too unsteady to write. Spruce beer was the favourite beverage at Southampton, with an occasional hamper of port and brandy. She admired Mrs. Bramstone's porter, and could drink as much wine

as she liked at Chilham Castle. Yet in the midst of all the port and madeira, she found time to think of the fourteen bottles of mead which they brewed by the twenty gallons at Chawton. She did not despise cards, and disdained not to gamble on occasion. There was hardly a game without its pool; but with the stake at three shillings, she 'could not afford to lose that twice in an evening.' It was for the same reason that Elizabeth Bennet declined to join the party at loo. Aunt Norris, however, though she knew no more of whist than of algebra, would play for half-crowns. Mr. Collins would never think of reading novels; but he did not mind losing at cards, or playing a noisy game of lottery tickets, and would never refuse making up a pool of quadrille. Even Mrs. Goddard would occasionally win or lose a few sixpences at Mr. Woodhouse's fireside. Lady Middleton would propose a rubber of casino; the Watsons brought forward the fish and counters. Jane Austen introduced speculation; wrote a few verses on 'Bragg'; played at cribbage after tea in Kent, as Fanny Price did till bedtime with her Aunt Bertram; and often played at vingt-un, the game which Jane Bennet and Bingley preferred to commerce.

Above all else, Jane loved the dance. Dancing and balls were the delight of her life. In her letters and novels her joy in these was immeasurable. Nothing could exceed the pleasure of their anticipation, or the happiness of their recollection. They were the dateless milestones by which events and persons were brought to mind. There is a dance in almost every letter, and balls in every tale. Wherever two or three are gathered together a dance is arranged. It mattered not where. 'Mrs. Bramstone's moveable apartment,' or Mansfield

Park, at the Crown Inn, or an assembly hall, Jane contrives or shares a dance. Without them her works would have lost half their merit, and her life half its cheerfulness. She who could 'dance just as well for a week as half-an-hour,' would certainly place this accomplishment among the virtues of her creations, and make it the medium of exchange where potential lovers wooed and won. There is hardly a lover or his lass in the novels of Jane Austen who, but for the propinquity of a dance, would ever have met at all. An indefatigable dancer herself, though her consequence varied at times for no particular reason, she would sit out rather than endure a lord's eldest son whose dancing did not please her. What balls had she not attended? Small ones of eight couples, 'hardly so large as an Oxford smack'; large ones at the upper rooms in Bath, with four dancing couples surrounded by about a hundred people. If Fanny Price was tired out by three o'clock, nothing tired Jane; she supped at one and was not at home till five, and upon one occasion, perhaps others, she slept in the nursery, the nurse and child upon the floor.

We have no doubt whatever that between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, Jane Austen thoroughly enjoyed herself. Even if her reading was sporadic, and her writing up to date somewhat superficial, we cannot deny that all the time she was deeply observant, seeking metaphors in every nook, and assimilating conversations from every gathering. Really we see nothing derogatory to the character of a young novelist in being called 'the prettiest, silliest, most affected, husband-hunting butterfly.' We are sure that Jane, did she know this, would have been secretly delighted to think that others of her sex thought her so ephemeral a charmer.

Mrs. Mitford, who gave her these appellations, left her home at Ashe, where her father was rector, when Jane was but seven years old; it does not seem to signify that, when one leaves a neighbourhood, all intercourse between former friends ceases. The daughters and sons of an adjacent parsonage would always be appropriate subjects for news. Jane was a frequent visitor at Ashe, in fact she was there only a few months before finally leaving Steventon, and the next day 'winds up four days of dissipation' by visiting another supposed sweetheart. The author of the *Memoir* at this time was a little boy of two. With the usual qualifications that we must deduct from or add to one woman's opinion of another, we find no reason for disagreeing with Miss Mitford's 'Mama'; and quite believe that Jane, in her younger days, was everything that she once called her favourite niece, 'the paragon of all that is silly, sensible, commonplace, eccentric. . . .' If Jane wrote thus to Fanny, who devoted some portion of each day to reading some pious author, which she called 'reading my goodness,' the author of *Our Village* has done no harm in retailing her mother's reminiscences of Jane Austen. Ashe had its gossips no less than 'Highbury,' and we thank the 'tiresome wretches' who perpetuated this welcome gossip about Jane, by informing Mrs. Mitford of her flirtations.

VI

AS OTHERS SEE HER

THE life of Jane Austen is a singular instance of a great writer, who, by personal intercourse or correspondence had no acquaintance with any of her contemporary celebrities. To be petted by Johnson, befriended by Burke, or teased by the King like Frances Burney; to correspond with Scott and breakfast with Rogers like Maria Edgeworth; to dine at Holland House like Hannah More; to be hailed as the Salvator Rosa of British novelists like Mrs. Radcliffe, did not fall to her lot. She was admired, just so. So were the violets that grew around Steventon Church, but it was all much ado about nothing. No bucket hung suspended in the middle of the well, while the drawer gazed upon her as she passed. No work of hers was recommended from the pulpit, or read aloud by the village blacksmith as *Pamela* was. No florist asked her permission to baptize a new hyacinth with her name, as even de Goncourt was once asked. Her anonymity created no sensation. Few were interested. Such lionising never came Jane Austen's way.

The caprices of fortune play strange tricks with the fame of authors. With the aid of 'cobbler's wax on his breeks,' the fertile brain of Anthony Trollope was as fecund as a green fly in progeny. He was doubly blessed. Writing upon Iago's advice, he thought with Johnson

that 'no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money.' He achieved both wealth and fame, and is to-day a classic. Jane, strive as she may, had neither, though none can deny her growing fame. Indeed, the little praise she received was somewhat grudgingly given and second-hand; it was mild and mingled. It never was her lot to complain, as Trollope did, of melted butter being poured down her back. That she placed on record in her own hand the prevailing opinions on two of her novels, is an unexpected trait that endears us the more to their author and heightens the charming simplicity of her character. The sententious judgments of her family, well-wishers, and a few crapulous individuals are catalogued without discrimination. The sweets mingle with the bitter. They constitute a criticism in themselves far more impartial than our favouring bias will allow, who have an eye only to her virtues, with which we are so obsessed perhaps that it blinds us to her shortcomings. To one, *Mansfield Park* was a mere novel; another thought the language was poor. One lady, 'having finished the first volume, flattered herself she had got through the worst,' and, adding insult to injury, 'owned that she thought *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* downright nonsense.' Such was the candid criticism Jane had to endure. One female judged *Emma* as Partridge did Garrick's acting, 'it was too natural to be interesting,' and another coldly confessed that 'had she not known the author, she could hardly have got through it.' She was blamed for caricaturing acquaintances she had never heard of, and censured for 'drawing such clergymen in such times.' There was too much Miss Bates for one, too much Mr. Elton for another. One man liked it so little that Fanny

would not send his opinion. What Jane thought of the lady who objected to *Emma* as 'exposing the sex' we should like to know. But the unkindest cut of all was from a man who read only the first and last chapters. With the price of books in those days, we presume they were all borrowers.

Happily there were others, whose praise was undiluted. *Emma* had introduced Mrs. Cage 'into a new set of acquaintances – Miss Bates is incomparable – the book, so very comfortable – no one writes such good sense.' These were the sentiments that moved A. B. Walkley to remark: 'Thank you, Mrs. Cage, for the *mot juste* "comfortable." '

Despite these opinions, some of them evidently quite innocently solicited, and others gleaned from letters and conversations, we somehow regret their lack of happy spontaneity and warmth. There is in them too little of herself to please us. We feel grieved at the absence in her life of some Janeite Boswell, who would have invested these dry bones in their fleshly settings, complete with the gestures of the persons who expressed them, together with the smiles and innocent derision of the recipient. That Jane ever eavesdropped, while others canvassed her praises, as is alleged, we would never believe; but we know that she once lectured her niece for exploiting the opinions of a friend, while hiding her acquaintance with the author. That these opinions were never written with the intention of their being exposed to the public eye we are convinced. Their existence, however, only makes us the more curious to divine the motives that inspired her to write them down. Was it the humour of an idle moment? Was it the impeccable artist eager to improve, memor-

ising the voice of criticism? Is the mellowness of *Persuasion* any criterion? Or was it the modest and obscure writer, deriving some secret satisfaction by making tangible the fleeting observations of her readers, so as to amuse her satirical fancy in private on the vanity of human wishes?

What indefinable something is it that pervades the works of this maiden lady which repelled our earlier admiration? We have asked ourselves this question for years. Then one winter's eve, beneath the green shade, we sit snug and comfortable, and read on and on, and are equally amazed at our past indifference – nay, callous neglect. We have discovered a new set of acquaintances whose charm we had heard of but never felt. The process of apotheosis begins, and is upon us before we are aware, and henceforth we are votaries. It is the same with Henry James, with Proust and Landor, with Mary Webb and Conrad, with Butler and Turgenev. Time and place, mood and circumstance must meet before we can appreciate to the full their especial virtues. Indeed, to such writers, ineffable must be the joys of creation when watered by its own consolations and the dew of heaven, else like the white violet in dry seasons they would die of thirst. No true artist, though he writes unheralded in solitude to a world that is dumb, ever wastes his beauty on the desert air; even if he knows that 'the harvests that are watered with ink,' as Balzac says, 'may never be reaped at all.' What Augustine Birrell once said of Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs*, and Zimmerman on *Solitude*, we could almost say of Jane Austen's works, 'their dark hour had come.' Like the novels of Henry James, they had ceased to circulate. Yet somehow, somewhere, hedged round by

a favouring divinity, they survived the drought. Such tardy recognition was antidote enough to pride and fuel in plenty for prejudice; was proof also of a refined sense and patient sensibility, and an earnest of the industry and confidence of the author who could endure such a fatal eclipse and still smile. Really, it requires the tenacity of the camomile to thrive with hopes so deferred.

Sir Egerton Brydges, though he thought Jane Austen handsome, 'never suspected that she was an authoress,' as if authors carry their genius upon their sleeves. Her nephew 'did not think her even clever, still less as being famous': perhaps he was too young. We excuse him, however, when we find that even Charlotte Brontë found in *Pride and Prejudice* only an 'accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face.' Holding such an opinion, we can quite appreciate her indignation at being told, by George Henry Lewes, to 'shun melodrama, finish more, and follow the counsel which shines out of Miss Austen's mild eyes.' That Lord Jeffrey, who had made the reputations of lesser men and marred those of great ones, was kept up by *Emma* for three nights is something to be proud of. For which Walkley 'forgave him what he said of Wordsworth,' though we had forgiven him long before for what he said of Keats.

Jane Austen was the favourite of queens and princes; of poets and statesmen; of economists and philosophers; of novelists and historians. What was it in Jane Austen that Queen Victoria highly appreciated, and the Prince Regent loved, that he should keep a set of her works in each of his residences? That he caused Leigh Hunt to be imprisoned for two years for calling him 'a fat Adonis of fifty,' does not deter us from thanking

him for the real pleasure he gave our heroine. Indeed, that Warren Hastings, after the turmoil of India and the rage of Burke, should turn for solace to the pages of Jane Austen, we forgive him even his alleged atrocities to the Begums. Did not the philosophic lover of George Eliot acknowledge her as one of the 'greatest artists of the greatest painters of human character,' and would rather have written *Pride and Prejudice* than any of the 'Waverley Novels'? Did not Southey 'find in her works passages of finer feeling than any other of this age'? Miss Mitford 'would have cut off one of her hands, if it would enable her to write like Jane with the other.' And Coleridge would sometimes burst into high encomiums of her novels. Was she not a favourite with Sydney Smith? Did not the charm of her novels beguile away the gout of Lord Holland? What was it in *Pride and Prejudice* that Walter Scott should read it three times, and Disraeli no less than seventeen times, and made Trollope declare as a young man that it was the best novel in the language? Why should Sir James Mackintosh be vexed for the credit of the *Edinburgh Review* that it had left her unnoticed, or Lord Tennyson pass by the landing-place of the Duke of Monmouth – it interested him not – for the exact spot where Louisa Musgrave fell? And John Bailey – whose recent death we all deplore – was not afraid to place her among the very greatest of all writers of comedy, by the side of Molière and Cervantes in Elysium. He praised her incomparable delicacy, felicity and certainty, her classical gifts and exquisitely perfect genius. It is really this paradoxical admiration that surprises us in all that concerns Jane Austen. Such is fame. Lord Macaulay and his sister, 'on matters of the street or the household,

they would use the very language of Mrs. Elton and the other inimitable actors on Jane Austen's unpretending stage.' He even compared her genius for creating striking portraits with Shakespeare himself, and proved it. His promised memoir, however, did not materialise. Her monument – did she need it – is still unraised. Instead, he carved her name on a bust of Frances Burney in letters of gold. All we can say is that if Jane Austen was estimated below her merits in her own time, who will grudge her the fullest praise in times succeeding?

VII

HER ART AND METHODS

In an age so rich in genius, we might say that Jane Austen lived 'unhonoured and unsung.' To biographers who require meaty subjects, she presents too tame a diet. Her seemingly colourless life had in it everything to honour, much to sing about, though nothing really to weep for. We are convinced that she was happy; her cup of content if not full – indeed, Johnson's meaning of 'enough' precludes the possibility of any such consummation – she had much to be thankful for. Her mind was a thing of beauty, and, after all, contentment is a thing of the mind. Unlike Henry James, however, her personal obscurity was complete, without wishing to achieve it. She lived, she wrote, and we might add was apparently forgotten. The dogs bark, the caravan goes on; Jane Austen stood still. She captured for literature a little phase of art, not much, more than a glimpse, but that little perfect. To cherish such art it must grow upon you. Forty years, perhaps, must look down upon you. You need not search with diligence to discover her beauties; but to inhale the incense which patient contact alone can communicate, you must stoop like a votary. To such a one her works give undiluted joy, and to wish them otherwise is to paint the lily or throw a perfume on the violet. Like those Gothic carvings on a cathedral, which Proust describes,

'hidden on the inside of a balustrade eighty feet from the ground, as perfect as are the bas-reliefs over the main porch.' That to us is Jane Austen's position in English literature.

All who wield the pen are workers in metal – malleable human metal; that one fashions iron and the other enchases gold does not detract from their art if the worker be honest. In fact, we envy them their felicities, and in passing, their wonderful fecundity. The peach may be tame after caviare; neither, however, comes amiss to the palate of a gourmet. You cannot live on Smollet, or diet on Rabelais; you can get fed up with Dickens, bored with Maupassant, surfeited with Balzac, and sickened with Hardy. Each in his place, like courses in a meal, is seasonable. Jane Austen comes in among the sweets, and to the literary palate is as toothsome as a peach. It would be no exaggeration to say that he who has no niche in his heart for her works has not lived. 'He misses,' as Mr. Strachey wrote, 'the elusive things that are so important, the indecisive things that are so curious, the ultimate things that are so thrilling.' Mr. Squire has even said that, 'Nobody who likes Jane Austen can be wholly bad or wholly stupid.' Indeed, the multitude of to-day may be right in the rich superlatives they use as to the merits of every succeeding star, but the multitude that includes to-morrow will prove seldom wrong.

To breathe her name in company with the literary giants of the age she so modestly adorned would appear to some, perhaps, ludicrous. We have, however, no apologetic thoughts when we claim for Jane Austen a place among the few, but above the many, in virtue of qualities that distinguish her as the cynosure of one

phase in the art of fiction. That she is tame we deny. There is passion enough for the discerning. 'In *Emma*,' says Archbishop Whately, 'there are cross purposes enough for cutting half the men's throats, and breaking all the women's hearts. But at Highbury, Cupid walks decorously and with good discretion, bearing his torch under a lantern, instead of flourishing it around to set the house on fire.' He who has not penetrated beneath the veneer of the apparently prudish sentiments that pervade her works would be surprised at the subtle traits of passion that lie concealed in her analysis of certain characters.

We have lived long enough to know that extremes of adoration or contempt are matters of temper; happy, fitful, moody. Judgments and opinions strike us as just or unjust in exactly the degree as we become votaries in love or apostles of indifference. Literary comparisons are always matters of taste. Gibbon said that *Tom Jones* would outlive the palace of the Escorial, yet Johnson thought *Evelina* superior to that novel. Do we agree? Do worshippers ever agree? We compare Jane Austen with no other. We love her for herself alone. We have worshipped at other shrines, but at none so truly as this. We have drunk from many rivers, but none so pure, none more sweet. We might say with the poet:

'If she be not fair to me –
What care I how fair she be.'

From Fielding to Hardy, novelists are mirrors of the age they flourish in. Jane Austen, however, is ageless. Late Georgian or early Victorian, she lived to bridge these periods, but of them she was not. The heart of her little world does not change with the passing of time

She deals only in the essences that are perennial. Her writings have that freshness, that any age might surmise they were the creations of yesterday, such emblems are they of any time. They point no period, they are dateless. There is nothing so faithful or so pure in the whole range of fiction. Such delightful innocence is hardly to be met with in literature. They all breathe that 'sanguine expectation of happiness which is happiness itself.'

One of the charms of Jane Austen is that her illusion of the world as reflected in her life and works was a cheerful one. She does not make you dream, or laugh, or shudder, or weep, or even think. She is neither a stimulant nor an opiate. She does not preach or propound. She redresses no wrong, initiates no movement, voices no sect. Jane's simple philosophy is comfort. In this she is the great artist. Her innocent view of life 'knits up the ravelled sleave of care.' Disraeli advised a course of Balzac as an antidote to disappointment: if that was so, he must have found in Jane an oasis, a balm. To cultivate the elixir of tranquillity, you must eschew for a while the lurid to imbibe her homely charms. Jane Austen pre-eminently comforts you. The world is rich. We love the others; we love them none the less that we love Jane more. In all her work she is charmingly feminine. We do not mean effeminate, far from that: she has bone and muscle and a subtle sinewiness of mind, yet that elusive quality of female daintiness, the touchstone of something gossamer in her composition, that defies any cold manly analysis. R. L. S. tells us that the weakling must be partial. Jane Austen is not a weakling, she is not partial. She portrays the life she knew as whole as is tolerable to the most

innocent; cut from her films more than ever met the public eye, and left behind more than a mere glance could penetrate. Really we might say of her works what Charles Lamb said of *The Compleat Angler*: 'To read would Christianise every human passion.'

Jane Austen gave us the plan of one novel, the models of three, the finished products of six, besides most interesting juvenilia. What she would have accomplished had she lived to the ripe old age of George Sand, Frances Trollope, or Maria Edgeworth, we can only surmise. That she had not overwritten herself is evident without her telling us, as she once did. You have only to compare the crudeness of the embryos with the polish of the completed works to know the world of difference that separates talent from genius. How she would have clothed these others will always interest us. The great six, however, have been dealt with so fully as padding to fill biographies that to detail would be needless repetition. A plot after all is next to nothing. Boccaccio entertained us with ten each in ten days, and there are a thousand and one in the *Arabian Nights*, not forgetting the adventures of Ulysses, the fables of Æsop, and the fairy tales of Hans Andersen. It is but a peg upon which genius hangs his trimmings. Like an amphora, it will hold oil or honey, wine or water, and will serve many masters: Homer, Euripides, or Shakespeare. Henry James summed up *The Warden* as the 'history of an old man's conscience,' and Jane Austen summed up *Camilla* as 'but an old man's playing at seesaw.'

There is greater ingenuity in Jane Austen's plots than at first appears.

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One is the innocent adventure of a country parson's daughter, her early disillusionment, and its happy sequel.

In another, we have a tale of three handsome half-sisters who triumph over the selfishness of their cold-hearted brother, his callous wife, and her mercenary mother.

One is the comedy of a country squire, with a foolish wife and five marriageable daughters who differ in temperament as the signs on the Zodiac, but all marry for love.

Another is the story of Cinderella, the superfluous child of shiftless parents, who is carried from the blissful poverty of her own home to be a rich uncle's parlour drudge. Disdainfully refusing the hand of a very wealthy young stripling whom she hates, she marries her foster brother whom she loves, to the chagrin of his ostentatious sisters and their poking old aunt.

One is the tale of a charming young heiress, whose vice was gossip, and amusement match-making. Elated by one success, in matching her own governess, she experiments on a schoolgirl; innocently toying with her persuadable young heart, she leads her on in the hope of making her the vicar's wife. In this design she is frustrated, for one day the vicar goes on his knees and pleads for her own hand. She scorns him. Later, he finds himself 'in the same room at once with the woman he had just married, the woman he had wanted to marry, and the woman whom he had been expected to marry.' Her 'insufferable vanity' again receives a rude shock when she finds herself the lesser loved of two, dangling on the strings of a young scoundrel – whom she surreptitiously loved – who uses her as a foil to make

another jealous and miserable. Luckily, she escapes this degradation, only to find herself caught in the web of her own folly and blindness, when the 'ingenious and animated suspicion' enters her brain that the man whom she has tacitly accepted is loved also by her too apt but now unwelcome girl pupil. This dilemma cured Emma. 'She had believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings, and with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny. She was proved to have been universally mistaken, and she had not quite done nothing – for she had done mischief.' 'She had been remiss, her conscience told her so.' Her blunders, however, 'teach her humility and circumspection in the future.' She marries a man old enough to be her father. 'My Lady Disdain,' like Beatrice, was converted.

Her last work was the tragi-comedy of an impecunious baronet, who was a snob, and his three daughters, one of whom is all sense, the others all consequence. A young girl's tender passion for a sailor, whose love she reciprocates but cannot accept: the family object to so degrading an alliance. 'Forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older, the natural sequence of an unnatural beginning.'

Between leaving Steventon and arriving at Chawton, many were the projects that must have passed through Jane's mind. Did she ponder over her mode of address? How did she approach her subjects? What were the intentions that floated in her brain? Was the matter discussed with her sister? Would she remain outside and eavesdrop with Argus eyes and ears at every crevice, as Fabre listened to the thrushes' concert, the crickets' symphony, and peered down the Lycosa's burrow,

creating for them their difficulties and testing their intelligence by her ingenuities? Or unfold her plots as a drama, using her descriptions and asides as stage directions and scenery? Would she follow in the wake of her characters as a shadow, seen but passive, following everywhere apparently unnoticed, but always there, clinging to them, as Ruth clave to Naomi, sharing their vicissitudes, one yet divisible, embodying each in herself, sleeping and waking, sighing and dreaming, loving and hoping; wandering alone among the shrubberies and walks of Chawton, as Trollope 'did among his rocks and woods, crying at their grief, laughing at their absurdities, and thoroughly enjoying their joys'? Did she write down their peculiarities, and hold imaginary conversations with them as Ibsen did with Hedda Gabler? Was there some motive, some plan or principle imbuing each plot, or just a plain tale of simple life well told? Her earlier novels, culminating in *False Impressions* and *Lady Susan*, she wrote in the epistolary style of her favourites, Burney and Richardson, a style that had now perhaps lost its novelty to publishers, and the reason, may be, for her ill success. Instead of being a confidante privy to the letters of her heroines and others, she became the snapper-up of unconsidered trifles and wove them to her plan, creating the present rather than relating what had passed. What were the alternatives that must have exercised her mind and made her change her mode of approach? Would she begin by making one of her characters an actor-spectator as Barrie did the dominie of Glen Quharity, or Goldsmith did the Vicar of Wakefield? Describe and open with a soliloquy as Tolstoy did with Oblonsky; retell from a canon's diary as Stendhal told of the Duchess Sanseverina, or bring

them before us as Pirandello his 'Six Characters'? Did she conceive a theme in a hack-chaise as Henry James did *The American*? Compare his preface to Jane's own *Plan of a Novel*: 'Scene to be in the country – Book to open with the description of Father and Daughter – who are to converse in long speeches – the Father to be induced at his Daughter's earnest request to relate to her the past events of his life.' Would she take a character 'out of the abodes of piety and peace of a parsonage,' as Conrad took 'Lord Jim,' 'to live beforehand in his mind the sea-life of light literature'? Compare with Catherine Morland, who lived beforehand in her mind the dreams of light romances. That such themes passed through Jane Austen's mind at this time one can well believe. What she did, we know. She wrote as Trollope advised Kate: 'In the old way, "Once upon a time" – the best way of telling a story.' We can only surmise her designs. We merely suggest the probability in the hope that others may enlighten.

That *Northanger Abbey* was a fable, we know. Jane has told us so. We wonder, however, whether *Sense and Sensibility* was written to illustrate the folly of Marianne's 'favourite maxim that no one can ever be in love more than once in their life,' and to disprove her 'systems and principles against second attachments.' Was *Mansfield Park* inspired to ridicule 'the moral impossibility of cousins marrying'? As the Duchess said to Alice, 'Everything's got a moral if only you can find it.' Emma wanted to marry everybody, but remain single herself. Moral: 'They who lay traps for others are often caught by their own bait.' Elizabeth and Darcy, like 'mustard and flamingoes, both bite.' Moral: 'Birds of a feather flock together.' Or was it to prove the adage that silly

mothers as often as not bring forth sensible daughters? And we might as well conclude by saying that the moral of *Persuasion* is, 'Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round.' Was there some moral idea behind her creation of Lady Susan? Did she conceive in theory what George Sand carried into practice; from what Henry James thought possible in the latter, 'as a sense of the duty of avenging on the unscrupulous race of men their immemorial selfish success with the plastic race of women? Did she wish – above all to turn the tables – to show how the sex that had always ground the other in the volitional mill was on occasion capable of being ground'?

Every novel is more or less a psychological study. Every character drawn is more or less a composite, the amalgam of many living pigments added to or converted into gold or dross, as genius or mediocrity dictates – made less wicked and more virtuous, or perhaps less virtuous and more wicked than they really are. Did we but know through and through the alleged prototypes in real life of the heroes and heroines, the villains and vamps, the saints and sinners we meet with in fiction, we would question their possessing half the virtues or villainies ascribed to them in the convex or concave minds of their portrayers. It is all a matter of angle. Spread over a lifetime, no villain is so bad, or hero so good, as he is painted. It is condensation in the coloured pages of fiction that heightens or deepens the glow that diffuses all. Think of the infernal world of Balzac, the majestic murders of Shakespeare, the low scoundrels of Dickens, the cold-blooded ergatocrats of Dostoevsky: what regions had they not rummaged to adumbrate their giants with the vices of guttersnipes?

In the eyes of Thwackum, if the end was virtuous it mattered not how foul the means. In the eyes of Square it matters not how foul the end if the means were virtuous. Think of Manon Lescaut, of Carmen, of Madame Bovary, of Madame de Renal. Think of Jean Valjean, of Julien Sorel, of Nehludov, of Heathcliffe, of Reuben Backfield, of Verhovensky, and Raskolnikov, of Jude, of Gideon Sarn, of Amos Morgan, and James Brodie. The depth of their sins is dyed by the love they inspire and the obsessions that enthrall them. If you do not meet such characters in a day's journey, in life's travels, however circumscribed, you are sure to come across the embryos of these storied creatures, the bas-reliefs of romantic minds, which the condensing power of art has made heinous or heroic, martyrs or monsters. Think of the uncanny intuition with which innocents have delved into the souls of devils.

What operation of the mind was it in Samuel Butler that gave to the sound of church bells the smell of 'squashed bugs'; or in Fielding's blind man that connected the colour scarlet with the sound of a trumpet; or in Bath water to Sam Weller, 'a wery strong flavour o' warm flat irons'? To Anatole France, there was no such thing as objective art – 'we can never get outside ourselves,' says he. Flaubert, on the other hand, would say that 'a novelist hasn't the right to express his opinion on any subject whatever – great art,' he said, 'is scientific and impersonal.' Yet George Sand could 'no more weep with something else than one's eyes or think with something else than one's brain.' There is this much to be said of the art of Jane Austen. Her world was ranged on so simple a scale, from Doh to

Doh, as it were, that her own personality could contain them all without straining our imagination. 'A few other novelists,' says David Salmon, 'may have kept within such narrow limits, a few may have written as well, but no other has written so well within such narrow limits.' There are no artificial puppets, none of your translucent models in pottery. You will find none of Hugo's monsters or his monstrosities. She plucked no rooted sorrows from minds diseased. There are several groups, each the composite of certain distinguishing characteristics, defined by the nicest gradations, in all of whom there is so much of each of us that no one can escape the penetrating gaze of some innocent foible to which we must secretly plead guilty. All are variations of self, herself, as reflected from others after impregnation in her heart and mind. Self-portraits mirrored and disentangled from the composite photograph of the people she mingled with. Each distinct, familiar, a neighbour, yet multiples of universal human nature itself.

Our impression is that she writes as one who knows, knows everything, knows more of everybody than they know of themselves. Each work is a drama that unfolds itself with but one change of scene. In a phrase of her niece, we might say, 'We dined at the Cottage, the Cottage dined here.' She moves in what she creates, yet remains outside. Like the camera man, she is ever present, yet never seen. Her impersonality is complete. Yet, unlike him, she is producer, scenario-writer, and actor in all she works in. She sees everything with her own eyes, every memory and ideal tinged with prior realities; the omniscient author who shows us what her puppets do and why they do it, the motives which impel and the consequences which slowly but surely befall

them: all reap what they have sown as sure as bloom follows bud. For every effect there was a cause. Even Mr. Woodhouse's submission to Emma's marriage was influenced at last, not by any sudden illumination of his mind, but by the psychological operation on his nervous system in another way of poultry thieves: the presence of a son-in-law meant security against such house-breakers. If the persistent 'I' does not obtrude itself, it slips out upon occasion to remind us of her presence. We make her acquaintance in *Northanger Abbey*, and again in *Sense and Sensibility*; once or twice in *Mansfield Park*, and anon in *Lady Susan*. The universal 'I' of fiction that, like some suspended acquaintance or disembodied creature, whom none can impetrate, with nothing to remind us of its presence but an ever-recurrent and unprofiled echo, the 'Mr. Whatisname' of Tomlinson. The chronicler of *Middlemarch*, defined by 'I's' and 'We's.' The mysterious 'I' who floats *The Golden Bowl*. The 'Present Scribe,' 'P.S.' for short, in *Trilby*. The historian, as in *Tom Jones*, who regales us with a feast as rich as any that the age of Heliogabalus produced. The vaguely defined initials of *The Possessed*, 'G.V.'; over whose shoulders someone even weeps and shows him their love-letters; who knew that one was melancholy, the other calm, and another paler than usual; knew the details of brief interviews even behind closed doors. The intermediary, the interloper, the irresistible eaves-dropper who could be in two places at once. Knew that Liza flushed though she was alone in the room, yet doubted upon one occasion, whether he himself had shed tears or no. That Jane Austen was one with her characters, how else could she know that Frank Churchill 'said nothing worth hearing – looked without

seeing – admired without intelligence – listened without knowing what he said'? That Marianne, 'watching the variations of the sky, imagined an alteration in the air'? Or what Elizabeth Bennet thought when she viewed Pemberley? We know also something posthumous to the novels. We know that the unexamined word swept aside by Jane Fairfax was 'pardon.' We know that Mrs. Frank Churchill lived only ten years after. That Mr. Woodhouse survived Emma's marriage about two years. That Kitty married a clergyman, and Anne Steele never succeeded in catching the doctor. We know that the considerable sum given by Mrs. Norris to William Price was one pound. That Mary with all her moral reflections attained nothing higher than one of her Uncle Philip's clerks. We also know that when in London she saw Miss Bingley's portrait.

The craft of writing was hers from earliest youth, and to obtain the proficiency she acquired she turned neither to the left nor to the right. Her only fear was, of finding a clever novel too clever, and her own story and people all forestalled. The fame she thirsted for in jest, though tepid and belated, gave zest to the consciousness of her powers. The 'sweet flattery' she cherished in private of being admired and read in Ireland was an earnest of that portrait of herself 'all red and white' she did not despair of having in the exhibition. The wish, though humorous, was father to the thought. Without some desire, nothing can be accomplished. Jane desired distinction, and would be less than human if she were contented with obscurity when she might rise to fame. The admiration and esteem of her contemporaries was dear to her heart, whatever she might think of posterity.

Jane was as pleased with praise and success as Frances Burney herself, but she loved what her brother Edward called 'Pewter' too. The elusive word fame is mentioned but once in her letters. She may have envied in others what she herself had never enjoyed; but apart from the above incident, that she at any time dreamt of posthumous fame we cannot find. She received so little of open, unreserved flattery that we could never conceive her as thinking, like Gibbon, that 'her name might hereafter be placed among the thousand articles of a *Biographia Britannica*.' Jane Austen did not live to write, or write to live. She just wrote, and, 'As an artist,' as she once said, 'can do nothing slovenly,' she wrote well; and incidentally hoped the gods would give her something. The great artist is impelled neither by fame nor wealth; she will accept both, but if she has neither, the latter is preferable. She did not look upon literature as the sacrosanct end of existence to the exclusion of all else. 'That people shall pay for their knowledge, if I can make them,' she did say. But if they would not, what could she do? Unlike the Goncourts and a few others, who loved to declare that they wrote for an audience of a dozen friends, apart from wishing that people would buy more and borrow less of her books, she never bemoaned her fate. Such recriminations savour too much of rancour, and rancour was the very element most alien to her disposition. On the other hand, had she been offered a 'little godship by a doting public,' would she have taken it, 'and cut away all the ties that might hamper her in her profession,' as Raleigh said Stevenson did? Never! Writing has its pleasures, profound, satisfying, expectant, and, be the alloys however base, they are chilled by hope. The gaze of

other eyes is balm, the praise of other tongues is nectar. Should the end belie the means, what then? R.I.P.: others have gone before. 'Men pay, and pay dearly, for pleasures less desirable,' said R. L. S. Yet he himself regretted at times not having stuck to an honest commonplace trade. Guy de Maupassant spoke with contempt of his craft as a writer, but he thought it better than stealing. Anatole France thought it wiser to plant cabbages than to write books. Flaubert was glued to his green table wrestling with bad assonances and agonised with style, yet he clung to this voluntary servitude. Proust kept alight the everlasting flame of literature on bromides. Joseph Conrad thought three hundred and fifty words a day a good average. 'Where will you find a man,' says Balzac, 'who is in love with his means of earning a livelihood?' Yet along with Dickens and Trollope have men ever toiled more laboriously at their art? Oscar Wilde once complained of having spent a week-end of back-breaking work in placing and replacing a comma. We are certain that Jane Austen was never so meticulous as that. She strove for perfection and each succeeding novel unfolds her maturing art. What made her write and keep on writing? Was it what Addison called 'the itch for writing'; or as Stevenson would say, 'the intoxicating presence of the inkpot'? Was it to 'justify Providence for having called her to the universe,' as Trollope's Dr. Pessimist Anticant said of himself? Did she polish? She must have. Models so perfect in design and feature never issued hot from the brain of man without such after refining that 'produces little effect after much labour,' her own words. Did her 'books come to her and insist on being written,' as Samuel Butler said of his

own? If Plato, as he says, took seventy shies at a sentence, and Pater's style was like the enamelled face of some old woman, neither of them, we are sure, ever uttered such cant as that.

Jane Austen loved unity, homogeneity, order; she hated the meandering, the desultory. What Scott said of Mrs. Radcliffe, that she was a 'careless knitter,' we could not say of Jane. Indeed, apart from Trollope, we know of no other novelist of whom we could say that she possesses so strikingly the three great qualities which Anatole France found in Guy de Maupassant. 'First clearness, then again clearness, and lastly clearness.' She envied Cassandra's close handwriting, and was angry with her own sprawly alphabet. She 'liked short sentences. Two full-stops in every line.' Like Gibbon also, she dearly loved the sound of three. She has what Alice Meynell so aptly said Jeremy Taylor, even in his prayers, calls 'measures of address.' 'Her openings,' said she, 'imply a firmer hold upon narrative than later novelists.' The 'he' or 'she' of persons named later, Jane avoids. She plunges the reader into the heart of her world and though you are left guessing to the last few pages, the whole panorama unfolds itself in orderly sequence. She just opens the casement and before you lies each circumscribed plot, like a Dutch garden, in cultivated spruceness, free from weeds, wildness, or superfluity. A delicious sympathy pervades the air; all is impeccable. They have what Schopenhauer would call the 'intellectual acquirement of a self-thinker': everything is well balanced and in complete harmony. From the first chapter to the last you are in the presence of a master craftsman who builds what is already present in his mind. 'When she began,' wrote Miss Thomson,

'she saw her way and knew how she would end.' There is not one motived incident to strain one's credulity. All is so evenly laid, and patterned so naturally, as to hide the art which made it possible. 'Jane Austen,' wrote Dr. Bradley, 'would deserve immortality if she had written only the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*.'

Where three or four families were gathered together in a country village, there Jane Austen wove a romance. She visualised her world in miniature. She loved the little stage where all her characters could be encompassed within the smallest limits, though pages of ours could not define. That in fact is where her glory lies. 'If her world is a microcosm,' wrote George Saintsbury, 'the cosmic quality of it is at least as eminent as the littleness.' There are no sentimental journeys, no trips to Abyssinia, no 'false representations.' 'Let the Portmans go to Ireland,' she once wrote, 'stick to Bath and the Foresters. There you will be quite at home.' Like the vicar's history of Wakefield, 'The year was spent in moral or rural amusement, in visiting our rich neighbours, and relieving such as were poor. All our adventures were by the fireside, and all our migrations from the blue bed to the brown . . . and those little rubs which Providence sends to enhance the value of its favours.' We might also well observe of Jane's novels what Goldsmith said of his, 'Such as are fond of high life will turn with disdain from the simplicity of *her* country fireside.' Nothing we know of could better describe the atmosphere of these novels, but the 'little rubs' were what she revelled in. This is one reason no doubt why her works have been called tame, or 'too natural to be interesting.' The fanatic usually is a Cyclops with one eye. Jane

Austen looked at life with eyes that were many-faceted; she saw through and around, a gift denied to bigots, who dwell on obsessions, magnify the trivial, see a Bagdad in every subway, and a green-eyed yellow idol in every nook, though without them life would certainly be too lugubrious; they have enriched our stock of harmless pleasure both in literature and art. There are no feuds in Jane Austen, no deep-laid plots. There is no Saga, no strong silent men, no rare specimens of the *genus homo*, no anomalous facts rummaged from the tropics of human depravity in what Walter Scott calls the *causes célèbres* of criminal jurisprudence. She gives us the little happiness of normal people, not the spasmodic and isolated tragedies of individuals. She paints the familiar, not the grotesque; the placid flow of everyday life, rather than its distressing aberrations. Guilt and misery she leaves to others; such odious themes distressed her. She sought only the humble realms of sweetness and light. This is the secret of her art: the 'Open Sesame' to what Mr. Walkley so aptly calls 'the literature of consolation.' There is a soothing smoothness in all she wrote that is a restful tonic to the jaded mind. To compare her as a novelist with Hardy is to compare Sullivan with Verdi in music, or in art, De Hooch with Hogarth. One tingles with humour, the other throbs with grief; one is lightsome and airy, the other anatomises melancholy. Jane sparkles, Thomas broods and moans. Jane Austen personifies comfort and happiness, Thomas Hardy embodies philosophy and death. One revels in balls, picnics, amateur theatricals, parlour games, innocent courtship, happy marriage; and the other in nightmares, evictions, suicide, homicide, atheism, matriarchy. Anything savouring of pain and

1. Complications 2. ageless 3. [illegible] 4. not true to life 5. s
of very weak experience and [illegible]

disgust Jane Austen discreetly passes over. There are no flights of romance. Scenes that would occasion an effusion of exotic assonances in Charlotte Brontë find no rapturous response from the pen of Jane. She touches nothing banal, aspires to no melodrama. There are two elopements each in three of her novels, three of which have the air of joy-rides, little platonic picnics, and end in marriage. Of the two projected, one ends in tragedy, another begins with spite. Among them one elopes with a married woman, another with his brother's fiancée. The heroines, however, though affected indirectly, are quite immune. Of things unpleasant she just touches the fringe. We could never picture her being tied to a mast to realise a snowstorm, like Turner, or reading a thousand volumes to write a novel, like Flaubert. The 'imperishable evergreens of her literary success' were not obtained like O. Henry's incorrigible humourist, by being a vampire to her acquaintances. She immortalised the circumscribed events of a small, genteel circle. Her themes were the ordinary everyday topics of a little world. Like Elia, her 'attachments are all local, purely local.' Modernity was her great characteristic. She depicted only what she knew, described only what she saw, and in all, she achieved no more than she intended. If she did not rise to what is called the 'grand style,' it was because such a style would have been utterly misplaced. It was not the art she employed but the material she worked in that was unyielding.

She coined no words, polished no sentences to the bone, eschewed the high-flown without descending to the banal commonplace. 'Civil-behaved' – 'nothing-meaning' – 'nothing-saying,' is all her stock of hyphenated words. There are none of Meredith's 'exquisitely-

tressed' – 'calypso-clad' – 'vividly-meaningfull' – 'clay-enclose' – 'mouth-abyss' – words. 'Anne, my own dear Anne,' says Wentworth, but there are no 'lymphatic emotions' about 'St. Cecilia up aloft before the silver organ pipes of Paradise'; no 'majestic old Gregorian chants' wafted across the waters. What Miss Bingley said of Elizabeth Bennet, that she had 'no conversation, no style, no taste, no beauty,' was mild to what the Madame Urbain of Henry James said of Clare de Cintre, that 'she was lean, too flat, too stiff, too cold, her mouth too wide, and her nose too narrow.' There is nothing about Jane Austen of what Proust calls the 'Dostoevsky side of Madame de Staël.' None of those 'deliquescent mandarin subtleties that he found in Bergotte's books,' and certainly nothing of his own perfumed traceries. 'Intoxicating forms of whiteness, like guelder roses clustering at the summits of their tall, bare stalks, like rectilinear trees in pre-Raphaelite paintings, their balls of blossom divided yet composite, white as annunciating angels and breathing a fragrance as of lemons.'

It has been suggested – though we do not for one moment believe it – that Jane Austen, because she gave us no landscapes, was short-sighted. That she did complain of her eyes, more than once, we know, but that she failed to appreciate scenery for this reason, we would as soon call Fabre short-sighted because he studied insects and not Leviathans. We have no doubt that her passion for dead leaves and a lovely prospect equalled that of Marianne Dashwood, but that her hatred of jargon made her keep such ecstasies to herself. We feel equally as certain that the prospect between Farnham and Alton which once enraptured William Cobbett and Young was the same, that made her

heroine exclaim, 'Look up it and be tranquil if you can.' 'Ye fallen avenues,' which Fanny Price, quoting Cowper, 'moaned,' was but an echo of Jane's own sentiments when the elms crashed in Steventon. The 'commonest natural production was food for her rambling fancy,' down even to the evergreens which Fanny rhapsodised about. Her restraint, however, was from choice, not lack of appreciation. She worked her embroideries with the needle and not the pen. You will never find one of her characters, like Soames Forsyte, 'under a parchment-coloured Japanese umbrella in a jade green tiled court surrounded by pink hydrangeas in peacock blue tubs.' You will search in vain for a 'little green-bronze Niobe veiled in hair to her slender hips, gazing at the pool she had wept.' None of Henry James's 'ivory statuettes' or 'sea nymphs on an ancient intaglio.' There are many weddings, but 'Hymen's saffron robe' was reserved for Mrs. Elton. From cover to cover you will find none of the sonorous phrases we have admired in Thomas Hardy. No 'lonely itinerants,' 'octogenarian youths,' or 'ecclesiastical romances in stone.' Few novelists knew more of vicarage life than Jane, but 'a zenithal paradise, a nadiral hell,' and the 'transcendental aspirations based on the geocentric view of things,' these were reserved for another, more controversial age; she knew them not. Stonehenge did exist, but whether she thought it a 'colossal rectangular architrave,' we do not know. The threshing machines of her day were certainly crude to compare with that 'portable repository of force with trapezoidal stacks' which Angel Clare saw surrounded with 'autochthonous idlers.' No, there are no 'spectral creatures and terraqueous distortions' in Jane Austen. None of

Sheila Smith's 'dew-drenched turf' or 'moon-smudged grass.' Or Mary Webb's 'butterflies-as-is-to-be'; and if there were, she would never dream of comparing them with man as is done in Conrad. As in *Mansfield Park*, we seem to see over every mantelpiece in Jane's homes, 'landscapes in coloured silks and transparencies,' where, among others, 'Tintern Abbey held its station between a cave in Italy and a moonlight in Cumberland.' But you will find no great cabinet, upon which the flickering gleam of an unsnuffed candle would glance with shifting obscurity upon 'the bearded physician Luke, now St. John's long hair that waved, and anon the devilish face of Judas,' which horrified Jane Eyre. The exhibitions of paintings she saw in London were not forgotten in her works. Pemberley had its miniatures and its gallery of family portraits; Sotherton its pictures in abundance. And what of 'the gentlemen in brown velvet, and the ladies in blue satin, that graced the wainscot of Kellynch Hall,' that 'seemed to be staring in astonishment' at their interlopers? Yet she never gushed. Not one metaphor did she extract to apotheosise her characters. They reminded her of no one but themselves. She gave to none the lineaments of angels or their opposites. There are no Grecian-shaped heads like Effie Deans'. No Hogarthian prints to remind her as Fielding was reminded of Miss Bridget. And certainly none of Stendhal's 'tender, voluptuous Correggio faces,' or Wells's 'glowing topaz with pale lips and amethystine eyes.' We yield to none in our admiration of the authors we have encroached upon, and in their contexts love even their mannerisms, a few of which we choose in no spirit of derogation of their genius or to extol the simplicity of our heroine, but merely to show what she

did not do. Had *Sanditon*, however, been elaborated as first drafted, would it, we wonder, have changed our opinion? Well may the question be asked: Why then all this 'to do' about an author who had so little of the glamour that surrounds the great names we appraise in literature, whose mild eyes pieced together the inconspicuous nothings seen and felt, familiar and commonplace, but seldom chronicled? We cannot explain it. We feel, but cannot estimate. We know, but cannot express in exact terms the hold which such art has upon its votaries. It is so crystal in its lucidity, so void of melodrama: an art which ripens with the maturing sun yet never pales. After the killing frosts of his eighteen pages' delightful depreciations, Professor Garrod confesses there is no one in literature to compare with her, unless it be Theophrastus; and though set down in malice, he knew of those to whom speaking lightly about Miss Austen is as bad as 'speaking against the prayer book.' Though poles asunder in their art, we feel as impotent to imitate Jane Austen as Macaulay felt before the colossal Burke. Both in their spheres are incomparable. Others wax and wane, but these in their different ways iridise.

Apart from merely touching the fringe of the sources that inspired her efforts, we confess our inability through lack of learning and leisure to probe the significance of misprints, and test in any way her alleged inaccuracies, or prove the exact dating of her first three novels. We hazard the opinion, however, that during the Chawton period a revaluation was taken of her first adventures, and that after the final revision they differed from their originals as much as *Emma* did from *The Watsons*. As only the cancelled chapter of *Persuasion* exists – to prove

the pains she took – of the six finished works, nothing is left us but to conjecture as to how much she 'lop't and crop't' before their publication. The question is, how much of the old wine did she preserve, if any, and to how many wines, if at all, did she give new bottles? We have come to the conclusion that after she had done with them, the originals would be unrecognisable even to their creator. Her method of composition we think an excellent one: one which exhibits to a remarkable degree the surprising versatility of her mind. Having milled one work, she begins another during the process of refining a second. The drudgery of correcting one, and ironing the other, was relieved by creating a third. Whilst *Sense and Sensibility* was about to be launched, and *Pride and Prejudice* was being polished, she was laying the keel of *Mansfield Park*. The three processes of authorship were collateral. The first was published in October, the third was begun in February of the same year, during which time the second was being winnowed and scanned. For *Emma*, however, no such partition of her efforts would do: she was sole and undivided. Later the same method presents itself. Having remilled *Northanger Abbey*, she begins *Sanditon* during the process of refining *Persuasion*; which process was not completed when through death they were left in varying stages upon the shelf.

Many and ingenious are the opinions and surmises as to the literary influences which prompted her efforts, but somehow we cannot help believing that never was a genius so little dependent upon the doings of others. Given the language, she furnished from herself the fancies she wove around the endearing creatures she immortalised. The flambeaux of German mystics and

platonic speculators which Chesterton says kindled the first torches of Coleridge and Carlyle, Jane Austen had no need of. 'Her fire,' says he, 'what there was of it, began with herself.' The sentiments that permeate her earlier fantasies could be traced, no doubt, to the spicy romances rehearsed and acted before her childish eyes in a Steventon barn. She read with the omnivorous appetite and innocence of youth all that came her way. The dramatic works of Garrick tickled her glowing fancy. Such sentences as 'Ambition began my misery, and matrimony has completed it,' she must have revelled in. As Dickens took *Household Words* from Shakespeare, so did Jane Austen take *Love and Freindship* from Garrick. Without Dr. R. W. Chapman, A. B. Walkley, and Brimley Johnson, however, what should we have done? No efforts of ours but we must dedicate to them. Our enthusiasms we attribute to Mr. Walkley; his own was so contagious. They are the labourers, we the drones. They are the 'bibliographers who watch for cancelled leaves and scrutinise proof sheets and manuscripts for first intentions.' It has been suggested that *Pride and Prejudice* was taken from a passage in Gibbon: nothing is unlikely about Jane. Mr. Brimley Johnson found that the 'delicate disclosures of Catherine Morland's heart were copied from *Evelina*, that the concluding sentence of *Cecilia* determines both the title and plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, and the last words of *Camilla* point no less to *Sense and Sensibility*.' Was Churchill, the village from which Lady Susan addressed her letters, called after the hamlet of that name, where Jane's admirer, Warren Hastings, was born?

Nothing is more certain than the scrupulousness of her care in chronology; the action of each of her novels – a

subject we hope to deal with – is proof enough of that. In fact, one of the 'faithful,' working with the calendar, fixed the Easter Sunday spent at Hunsford and found a definite date for nearly every event in *Pride and Prejudice*. With such a critic as Cassandra for 'reader,' few errors of etiquette or chronology were left uncensored. It was her brother Edward, however, who discovered those apple trees in *Emma*, that bloomed in July. Orthography changes with time, but it may be taken for granted that the free and candid criticisms of many family perusals would purge all anachronisms. She who knew that to introduce any plain Cecilia to a lady, or a country surgeon to a lord, would not be quite correct, was well versed in the proprieties; knew also that the rules of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected with her story.

There is no doubt that Jane was 'nice' in manner, in diction, in expression, and in mind. Everything must be just so. She was a stickler for correctness in writing, in morals, and of proportion; nothing must be exaggerated or inconsistent. Anything 'full of unnatural conduct and forced difficulties,' as she once said, 'was foolish.' To plunge anyone into a 'vortex of dissipation' was thorough novel slang, as old as Adam. She could not bear it. 'Bless my heart,' she would expunge as not allowable. 'A lover speaking in the third person,' she did not like. 'A faithful promise,' puzzled her. That her sister Cassandra persevered in giving a final 'e' to invalid, and her fondness for adding a vowel wherever she could, would not pass unnoticed, and was playfully commented upon in the same strain as she once teased her nephew, who, writing from home, tells her that he had come home. Every inelegant phrase or slang she qualified.

She would say, 'What a contretemps, in the language of France! What an unluckiness, in that of Madame Duval!' In another letter she says, 'I called yesterday morning; ought it not in strict propriety to be termed yester-morning?' Which suggestion she put in practice in *Persuasion*. Fanny Price was 'knocked up' several times. Henry Crawford said, 'matrimony was a take in.' And as Liza Doolittle said, 'They did the old woman in,' Jane, writing to her sister, would say, 'In the delicate language of Coulson Wallop, Lady Bridges is in for it.'

Exactness was a family virtue. As her admiral brother once complained of his watch, that had varied eight seconds in so many years, so Jane's characters would sometimes quibble over fractions of time and space. 'You have been here a month, I think?' said Henry. 'No, not quite a month. It is only four weeks to-morrow since I left Mansfield,' said Fanny. And we know the 'feminine lawlessness' of Catherine Morland and Mary Crawford on miles. Apart from the vulgar Misses Steele, the ill-bred Mrs. Jennings and the ill-mannered, exuberant Thorpes, we doubt if one instance could be quoted where she tripped in person over any ill-expressed sentence. And with the exception of one servant, we do not think she had recourse to dialect of any kind. 'Without being overpowered with Johnson or Blair,' as Miss Tilney was threatened, Jane Austen was nice in every sense of the word, in 'neatness, propriety, delicacy, and refinement.' With Mr. Woodhouse she could have said, 'I am nice.' If she did not rise to the dizzy heights of Meredith, she steered a middle course; but her fancy is certainly not a quibbling one. We can hear her saying, 'I abhor every commonplace phrase;

everything worn or hackneyed out of all sense and meaning; make a conquest; setting your cap at him; catching him; drawing him in; violently in love: I detest jargon of every kind.' Jane was one with the characters who uttered these detestations. In *propria persona* she did say, 'A few typical errors there may be, a "said he" or a "said she," but I do not write for such dull elves as have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves.'

'It is easier to feel than to estimate a genius which has no parallel.' For that one sentence alone, Mr. F. W. Cornish's biography of Jane Austen was worth writing. It sums up in one line what we have tried to express, as to the art which was hers in its quintessence. She raised the novel to the highest place in literature in virtue of qualities other than those which Alice Meynell found in Meredith. She is indeed the 'classic novelist.' Never were motived incidents better planned, designed with more coherence, or knitted together with less complications. And never did the unexpected unfold itself so artlessly, or with so little travail and unerring premonition. Her prose is so uniformly excellent, so profoundly good, that to pick and choose is difficult. In fact, she regales you with such beautiful English, her fare is so rich and wholesome, that to distinguish any particular passages is invidious. Johnson's praise of Addison could with equal truth be applied to Jane Austen. We might say, he who gives his days and nights to Jane, if he does not acquire a good English style, will not have spent his time in vain. She combines beauty with endurance, economy with quality, warmth with strength, humour with grace, cleanliness with simplicity, charm with dignity. All, however, would have no

purpose were they not imbued with the delicate traceries of her feminine fancies.

With all the variety of human expression, how addicted we are to certain words, phrases and ejaculations; the unconscious utterance of which besprinkles the conversations and writings of most men. How fondly we dote on cherished words and sugared sentences, many of troubled birth and sad demise, consoling ourselves that such were the darlings 'Q' bade us murder, when perhaps they were all behind. We look up and are not fed. Did not Matthew Arnold, that idol of a past generation, have his obsessions? Did he not 'double spades and redouble' with his 'Sweetness and Light' and 'Criticisms of Life'? Was it sacrilege to count them? Even the favourite verbs of Gibbon have been subjects of comment. The Forsyte ladies were all 'Gingers,' we think, varying from fair to chestnut, brown to bronze, auburn to red-gold or dust colour, and their favourite colour, jade; always jade. If our beloved John Galsworthy's favourite colour was green, his favourite word is 'mousing'; the aptness of the expression, as applied to Soames, seems to tickle us. With Charles Morgan it was 'purred,' a pencil *purred*, a name was *purred*. 'Lancinating' is the favourite of Dr. Cronin. With Jane Austen it was 'tolerable,' everything was *tolerable*. It ran in the family: Mrs. Austen used it, Cassandra used it, Jane revelled in it. There is hardly a letter in her life, or a chapter in her novels, that does not contain it. As with Huckleberry Finn it was her favourite in every mood. In her first novels it vied with others in popularity, but as the years rolled on, one by one they fell into disuse; *tolerable* alone remained. We do not know that it matters much, but as we love

everything about Jane Austen, it may interest others with more leisure and a greater love, perhaps, to trace in these the gentle unfolding of her genius, how she kept this one and lost the others. As Cruden in his *Concordance* counted the insects vile and busy in Holy Writ, so have we counted the variations of 'tolerable,' 'amazing,' 'vast,' 'prodigious,' and 'monstrous' in Jane Austen. What made us do it we do not recollect. We could give the numbers did it not appear so coldly arithmetical. It will suffice, however, to say that in *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility* 'tolerable' is outnumbered by three to one. But in all her other works, it overwhelms the rest by six to one. She who had such an eye to the characteristics of others had an ear equally discerning for their favourite expressions, all of which so aptly fit their characters; and all so alike to the unchanging exclamations we hear every day from the persons with whom we converse. Lives there a family to-day without its foibles of utterance, where son twits father, daughter twits mother, and each the other of some redundant absurdity, to the joy of all? The Austen family, we are sure, revelled in it; if noses were subjects of mirth, phrases were more so. Jane treasured them all. 'Well I declare,' said Miss Bates. 'To be sure,' said Harriet Smith. To John Dashwood, all was 'vast.' To Sir John Middleton 'monstrous.' 'Lord bless you!' exclaimed Mrs. Jennings. 'Oh la!' laughed Lucy Steele. 'Good Heavens!' uttered Catherine Morland. Everything was 'amazing' to Isabella Thorpe. Indeed with most of the earlier characters it was always 'prodigious' this or 'monstrous' that. How many times did Mr. Price say 'By God!' and James Thorpe say 'Damn it!'? But the one who amuses us most is the Vicar of Highbury.

'Dreadful!' said Mr. Elton. 'Exactly so, indeed. Very true my love, very true, exactly so, indeed.' The mention of this phrase brings with it a train of happy recollections of 'Alice' and the 'Duchess,' of Mrs. Elton and her *cara sposo*, of picnics and strawberries. And Mr. Clay, like all 'lawyers who plod their careworn way,' must 'presume to observe' and 'take leave to suggest.' Like Vicar Morland also, Jane was fond of puns, especially those on the surnames of her acquaintances. If Mrs. Driver was *driven up*, and Mrs. Knight had a tolerable *night*, Mrs. Bent was also *bent* upon being very detestable. If she spoke of a person's *rents*, she hoped they were equal to his *rants*. If the subject was the harvest, she could not refrain from alliteration on the farmers' names, 'The *Holders* of Hay,' and 'The *Masters* of Meadows.'

Passing events, political and social, military or naval, the historical cataclysms that date the march of time, she hardly mentions in her works, and only rarely in her letters. The boisterous currents of government did not affect her in the least. The price of bread, of tea, of butter, and of various trimmings did interest her, and were apparently no less in her thoughts than books, painting, music, and plays. But of the fulminations of Burke, or the rantings of Peter Porcupine, that such persons existed you would never guess. Garrick, Kean, Mrs. Siddons, Reynolds, Johnson, Goldsmith, Richardson, Burney, Scott. Yes! But of the Court of St. James or Parliament. No! No more than 'Mrs. Hurst's gown.' Apart from a stray wisp here and there, one would never believe that over a century divides us and these novels. We know of the orange-coloured cuffs and capes of Sir Walter's livery; that sedan-chairs were rung for

in Bath; and that three-shilling pieces were current coin. The conveyances mentioned are also some guide. The chaises from hack to post, the barouches and gigs, the curricles and phaetons, the chariots, the tandems and landaulettes, not forgetting the donkey carriages. Whether the 'Huxham' which Cassandra took for her health was an elixir or a cough cure; or the 'Gowland' which Anne Elliot was suspected of using for her complexion was cold or vanishing cream we really cannot tell. As Jane shunned any description of finery at weddings, so she avoids the pomp and circumstance of great events. She knew more of Trafalgar and Waterloo, of the slave-trade, and the French Revolution, than most women could have known in those days. If she spoke of Nelson, it was only to compare him with her brother. That she spoke disparagingly of Sir John Moore as a Christian and a son, her acquaintance with his family is better than we ken. Though she had brothers and relations in the van and the outposts of the world, when she sat down to write her novels, such subjects, like 'the flowers that bloom in the spring, had nothing to do with the case.' She drank only from the Pierian springs of human nature; the wide seas and mighty rivers she left to the purveyors of history. The wonder is that with a pen so facile and knowing so much, she was capable of such restraint.

VIII

PORTRAITS, PLACES, AND ALLEGED IDLERS

FAR from Jane Austen having never copied a character from a known person, we are convinced that her novels contain hardly one portrait that is not a copy with variations of one or many of the people she came in contact with. The heroines, the villains, the heroes, the clergymen, the bores and shrews, are all composites of known persons. Jane knew them, Cassandra knew them. Behind her early anonymity there was something other than modesty; a delicate complex of fear and pride. The very truthfulness of her painting permitted none to escape. She was, however, spared any distress on this point by the perfection of her art.

She distorted nothing. 'Listen to this fable,' says France. 'One day a mirror with a perfectly flat surface met a convex mirror in the garden' – the reader will surmise the outcome. Our point is, that Jane's mirror was a perfectly flat one. Though she did not caricature men or things, she must have been fully conscious of the little absurdities she derided, and the foibles she exposed; and feared somewhat the effect upon some of her acquaintances. That she introduced real persons into her novels was, to Goldwin Smith, a 'baseless surmise'; and her nephew, to prove the impersonality of his aunt's creations, has given us an ingenious analogy of the bee.

Jane certainly extracted copy from her neighbours, as the bee did honey from flowers; but with this difference: she 'turns them to shapes' and gave to each a 'local habitation and a name,' re-creating in other guise her old familiars. We are not surprised to learn that her relatives 'never recognised any individual in her characters.' Those of to-day, however, recognise many. Such curiosity is food only for hierophants. To look for the pen-portraits of an author is but a phase of adoration, a kind of literary canonisation. It was beyond question to Addison, that Homer in the diversity of his characters had an eye on some real persons then living: Nestor was the figure of some ancient patriot; Paris some effeminate fop. In the spitefulness of Thersites he disguised an enemy, and in Ulysses a crafty statesman.

Dante's hell is peopled with his hatreds, his heaven with those he loved. At any rate, Guelph captains have been identified as the occupants of the Phlegethon, and we are certain of Beatrice. Balzac followed the thread of two thousand separate existences without entangling them. So did Dickens. Were they figments of the brain? Jane Austen was certainly 'too proud of her gentlemen to admit that they were only Mr. A. or Colonel B.' But that they differed in essentials from some such persons we doubt. What author will admit that his portraits are real? To one who shrank with virgin modesty from publicity, such a confession would have appeared ignominious. To ask the question is to court denial. To say as she did that Edmund Bertram and Mr. Knightley 'are very far from being what I know English gentlemen often are'; she could have said with equal truth, 'what I know English gentlemen often are – not.' To a friend her evasiveness was justified. What really was it that

Cassandra found in her letters, that made her destroy so many of them? Was the growing fame of her sister an earnest of some too prying curiosity which displeased her? The reality of an author's creations is a privacy where angels alone may tread. Could we but follow in their wake, we would know all. This much, however, we know; that man's limitations are bounded by an alphabet, and though truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, beyond the bounds of human probability none can stray without being fabulous or chimerical.

'Don't invent sufferings you have not experienced,' wrote Tchehov, 'and don't paint pictures you have not seen.' On this point Jane Austen needed no telling. This was exactly what she did not do. Neither did she draw characters that were not known to her; we do not say completely; propinquity alone, without even an acquaintance, will furnish many important details to an artist continually on the look-out for traits in human nature. Turgenev drew the character of Bazarov from a young doctor whom he met on a train journey. You may mingle with men in the gross and feature the foibles of a multitude, but to portray one, you must visualise an individual – as Jane did 'Miss Bingley' – and generalise from the many. Man creates nothing but after his own image, and that is stereotyped. Art is merely assimilation. Jane Austen did not create her characters any more than Turner did his skies; both were the result of long years of patient observation. Prudhomme must have had some beautiful church in mind, that he should visualise the perfect one, with the spire of Strasbourg, the colonnade of St. Peter's, and the portico of the Parthenon. Grounded on her beautiful self, so did Jane give us Elizabeth, Anne, Fanny, Elinor, Emma, and

Catherine, varying their characters with the happiest tints of those most dear to her. She, who at Steventon assisted her father in his parish duties, and sometimes filled in the marriage register, was privy to unrecorded incidents that nothing could efface and exactly suited her taste. As Shakespeare, during the long pauses of the ghost in *Hamlet*, must have peeped through some chink to observe his royal audience, and kept both ears wide awake to their chatter, but found them in essence only costly editions of his humble familiars in Stratford-on-Avon. She, who had spent the first twenty-five years of her life in a country rectory, when the great days of Chawton arrived, knew also a wider world; had looked at its wealth through the eyes of indigence; had seen its gaieties from an angle of confirmed celibacy; knew its vanities, its coldness, its indifference and blunted delicacy; had met the finished product of those who now again passed her study window – on their way home from Winchester School – filling post-chaises with 'future heroes, legislators, fools, and villains.' Yet withal, their likes she had met in earlier, more innocent days; her heart was still amid parochial scenes and her mind stored with the fleeting murmurings of girlish intangibilities. There were models in plenty for Jane Austen to draw upon. Miss Mitford's anonymous friend may have been one of those who had cause to be afraid of one whom she called 'a poker – a delineator of character who does not talk.' There must have been several editions of Mrs. and Miss Bates, as one of Jane's friends 'was convinced they were meant for acquaintances of hers,' people whom Jane had never heard of before. Another lady liked *Emma* less because her namesakes were mentioned in it. And there were two sisters, one

named Fanny, both of whom 'had a great idea of being Fanny Price.'

No novelist is immune from the suspicions of his neighbours. You cannot paint fancy portraits but the quaintness of one will stick to others. Every pharmacist in Seine-Inférieure recognised himself in Flaubert's Homais, and wanted to box his ears; but a gentleman of Rheims sent him his congratulations on having avenged him against a faithless one, though Flaubert knew none of them.

When George Sand wrote, 'I don't write satires – I don't write portraits – I invent,' she was but echoing what Jane Austen had expressed before her, with her dread of 'invading social proprieties.' Withal, we ask, 'Invent what?' Jane would not invent even the name of a ship.

'The woman can only cease to be the woman when angels have disrobed her in paradise.' The angel on the right hand of the Holy Family which Filippo Lippi painted from memory, played and sang in real life among the infidels. Landor knew the frailties of men; his portraits are not altogether imaginary. The 'Tête de la Douleur,' so full of pathos, by Rodin, served the artist in his 'Ugolin,' and in 'L'Enfant Prodigue'; for a tragedian like Eleanora Duse and a saint in 'Jeanne d'Arc.' There is no fancy but is founded on a base of facts. Portia visualised her ideal husband, but Bassanio already existed in her mind.

All men and women at heart are much the same and very human.

From her multitude of sitters, Jane Austen painted her portraits with pigments drawn from familiar sources. Balzac rummaged directories, and Dickens scanned

school-lists, but Jane's nomenclature is as homely as her characters. Like her acquaintance, Captain Foote, she was a 'professed adversary to all but the plainest.' There are no euphonious names like Philadelphia or Leonora, though they belonged to aunts of hers. But her letters and books abound with common names. There were Fannys galore, one or two Catherines, Elizabeths in plenty, Janes not a few, and several Emmas. There are Mariannes, Louisas, Annas, and Marys. Her heroes and villains, like her heroines, with few exceptions carry names that could be found among her brothers, her nephews and nieces. To meet anyone agreeable named Henry was to her 'a proof how unequally the gifts of fortune are bestowed.'

We have found Wickhams and Willoughbys, Musgraves and Middletons, Prices and Palmers, Howards and Haywards, Gardeners and Grants, Eltons and Edwards, even Martins and Osbornes. But no trace have we discovered of Bennets or Bates, or Darcys and Dashwoods, or Morlands, Woodhouses or Elliots. There can be no doubt, however, that their character-sakes were among the Portmans, Papillons and Perrots, the Plumptrees and Powletts, the Digweeds and Dicksons, the Cookes and Cages, the Biggs and Bramstones, the Milles and Skeets, the Cravens and Foresters, the Franfraddrops and Seagraves. These were the people among whom Jane moved and lived, and like the shreds and patches which Cassandra gathered to make her rugs, were the motley with which she wove her fancies.

Lord Brabourne has hinted that Jane's sailor brothers were probably the examples from which she drew her ideas for their kin in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*. And

recently in the *Cornhill* a grandson of one of Jane's elder brothers gave us the opinion of his grandfather, Sir Francis Austen, that 'parts of Captain Harville's character – have a considerable resemblance to mine.' There can be no doubt also that William Price and Frederick Wentworth are both counterparts in some ways of Charles and Frank. For Admiral Croft, there was the Admiral Bertie of her Southampton days; the 'old toughs' of Bath, and the short-legged Admiral Stanhope with his long-tailed coat. Captain Harville 'varnished, carpentered, glued and made tops for the children.' Frank Austen 'made very nice fringe for the drawing-room curtains.' He even 'turned a very nice little butter churn for Fanny.'

Her clergymen are composites of a great many acquaintances. As we have said, her family radiated parsons. She knew the profession inside out: upon the hearth and in the parish. From Steventon to Deane, from Chawton to Ashe, the clerical conceits of a county were within her purview. And when in London she did not fail to attend St. Paul's, Covent Garden. Indeed, the respect in which the Church and clergy were generally held by the majority of her characters testifies to a consequence of which even Jane herself must have been proud. Besides her father, two brothers, nephews, and cousins, there was Mr. Heathcote, Prebendary of Winchester, Archdeacon Lynch, and various rectors; also, later in life, the conceited and condescending royal chaplain. But there were others – young, noisy, headstrong, wayward, weak, in whom, who can fail to discern traits of Collins, Elton, Ferrars, of Bertram and Tilney. There was the 'beautiful wiseacre,' Mr. Peach. There was Edward Cooper, of whom she hoped that

'he would not send one of his letters of cruel comfort' to her bereaved brother. There was another, who, 'besides having a vulgarly shaped mouth, talked too much and was conceited.' And Peter Debary, a 'Peter in the blackest sense.' Also the stubborn, self-willed Ben Lefroy, who did not take holy orders until about three years after his marriage. There was Mr. Papillon, the bachelor rector of Chawton, of whom Jane derisively wrote, 'I *will* marry – whatever may be his reluctance or mine.' And James Digweed, about whom she teased Cassandra. Then that 'piece of noisy perfection,' Mr. Blackall. Also Mr. Paget, 'a married man with a very musical wife.' And the very religious Mr. Brecknell, who had black whiskers. And what of Dr. Mant, the flirting Southampton clergyman, who, despite his apposite 'observations on the Litany,' would 'run after' Jane's friend, Martha Lloyd, 'in the street to apologise for having spoken to a gentleman while she was near'? 'Poor Mrs. Mant,' no doubt outraged at such conduct, 'could stand it no longer. She retired to one of her married daughters.' Martha's kindness to Jane and Cassandra was such that they could overlook so venial a fault, and were unwilling to undeceive one 'who so highly prized happiness of any kind.' 'That Dr. Mant was a clergyman, their attachment, however immoral, has a decorous air.' Such conduct in the novels, Jane would never have countenanced. We think of Mary Crawford, and Edmund Bertram's righteous indignation. 'It was the detection – oh, Fanny! – it was the detection, not the offence, which she reprobated.'

Who could fail to associate the ill-bred Mrs. Elton and her *cara sposo* with the short and eccentric little Rector of Kennington and the large Widow Billington, whom

he made his wife, 'that ungenteel woman with self-satisfied and would-be elegant manners and affected refinement,' whom, along with la Mère Beauté and 'smiling, flirting Julia,' Jane met at Chilham Castle and was entertained by their 'bits and scraps'? Or Mrs. and Miss Bates, with Mrs. Milles, 'who died on the wrong day at last after being about it so long'; and Molly, her daughter, whose queerness provided Jane with plenty to laugh at, with her odd expressions and foolish minuteness, when she undertook in *three words* to explain something and talked about it for half an hour. And Mrs. Stent, 'ejaculating some wonder about cocks and hens, always in the way, unequal to anything and unwelcome to everybody.' Or good Mrs. Deedes, 'well stocked in gossip and scandal.' And Lady Saye and Sele, who tormented Mrs. Austen, but afforded Jane many a good laugh at Stoneleigh. Was the fussy Mrs. Bennet imaginary, the upstart Mrs. Churchill, the proud Mrs. Ferrars, the ill-bred Lady de Bourgh, the spiteful, narrow-minded Mrs. Watson, the silly Mrs. Jennings, the mercenary Lady Denham, the shiftless Mrs. Price? We have no doubt that Jane sometime or other had met them in person. There were the civil, kind and noisy Mrs. Bramstone, who talked a good deal of nonsense, and Mrs. Powlett, expensively and nakedly dressed. The fine ladies of Steventon, 'with their heads full of bantam cocks and Galinies.' Lady Fust, and the 'novelties – two old Mrs. Pollens and Mrs. Hayward.' The genteelish Miss Hook and the ungenteel but well-behaved Mrs. Drew. Lady Elizabeth Hatton and her Annamaria. The Malings, whom Jane avoided, and Mrs. Edward Bridges, 'a poor honey – the sort of woman who gives me the idea of being determined never to be well and

who likes her spasms and nervousness, and the consequence they give her better than anything else.' Who could apportion Mrs. Austen's contribution to these portraits, who, though she 'continued hearty, sometimes complains of an asthma, a dropsy, water in the chest, and a liver disorder?' And there was Mrs. Holder, 'who did the only thing to make one cease to abuse her – she died.'

For the heroines greater and lesser and all the silly misses who crowd her pages, there was material to provide her with more than enough. In 'the jolly, handsome, ignorant Miss Coopers'; the Miss Blackstones she 'did not like'; the vulgar Jervoises and noisy Terrys; the 'broad-featured' Miss Coxes. There was Miss Charteris, Maria Montressor, and Miss Irvine, 'with her retrospective, jealous, inconsistent style.' The Miss Ballards, who 'did not talk freely enough to be agreeable.' The silly Miss Maitlands; the six female Faggs, 'so very plain'; the 'odious Debarys'; and Miss Harding, 'an elegant, pleasing, pretty-looking girl about nineteen, I suppose, or nineteen and a half, or nineteen and a quarter, with flowers in her head and music at her finger-tips.'

There was also Martha Lloyd, 'friend and sister under every circumstance'; and Anna Austen, 'with variations,' who was best suited with 'the miscellaneous, unsettled sort of happiness.' Also Fanny Knight, 'almost another sister'; she was Jane's delight, 'handsome, agreeable, fond of society, her practical common-sense, how capable, very capable of being really in love – you can hardly think what pleasure it is to me to have such thorough pictures of your heart.' Then Cassandra, dearest of all, a 'Daniel as ever Portia was,' and above

and below all, Jane herself. As Maggie Tulliver is known to have much of Marian Evans in her composition, so do these butterflies and prudes of Jane Austen reflect her heart and mind.

Indeed, who could not discern in the families she moved in, the boy Bertrams, and brothers Ferrars, the Churchill, Wickham, Crawford, Elliot, Denham, Musgrave and Willoughby stamp, and traits of Bingley and Darcy, Knightly and Middleton, Tilney and Wentworth, the heroes, 'anti-heroes,' and minor males? There was Tom Lefroy, the embryo Chief Justice; and 'Warren'; Mr. Chapman's, John Willing Warren of St. John's and Oriel; and that visionary, 'on whom she once fondly doted,' whose abode she once 'contemplated with melancholy pleasure.' There was George Hatton, 'handsome, agreeable, who danced very well and flirted famously, more sensible than brilliant,' the 'ambitious and insincere' Mr. Lushington, M.P.; and Mr. Wigram, one of twenty-three children of a rich mercantile. Also Mr. Calland, 'the genius and flirt of the evening' in a Christmas ball at Basingstoke. The lords she had danced with, the men she dined with; Mr. Phillips, 'who talked from books,' Mr. Holder and Mr. John Harwood, 'our two lively neighbours,' and later in life, Mr. Haden, 'our precious – something between a man and an angel.' Again, what of her brothers, the squire, the clergymen, the sailors, and the officers whose acquaintance she must have made in Bath and Southampton? And the other 'gentlemen and half gentlemen' she came across, together with 'all the meaner and more usual etcs.,' whose names did not interest her?

And who can doubt that, as George Eliot gave us her

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mother and father in Mrs. Poyser and Adam Bede, Jane Austen gave us in Mr. Woodhouse, Mr. Watson, and Vicar Morland, her father's charm and tenderness of heart? There were also numerous children at close quarters for her studies of childhood. There was the motherless Anna whom they nursed; the children of her sailor brothers; Edward's large family; and the offspring of James's second marriage, that once made up the crowded company who travelled by carriage from London to Godmersham, including Jane and her 'boa'; she felt herself rather an encumbrance, and more so as Caroline, 'a child of three and fidgetty,' was of the party. Which reminds us of 'sweet little Annamaria – the three-year-old pattern of gentleness,' one of the three children in Barton Park, 'who might and should have been kept in better order.' That Jane, as Mrs. Meynell says, 'sharpened her pencil' on this occasion, was perhaps a reminiscence of an episode during the above drive on a hot midsummer's day.

We surmise also that Jane must have received the same injunctions from her brothers as to the care of their children as 'John Knightley' gave 'Emma.' 'Do not spoil them, and do not physic them.' The most trivial commonplaces of everyday life were garnered to enhance the homely charm which permeates her novels. The two mothers and two grandmothers debating the comparative height of their children in *Sense and Sensibility*, was but an echo of the same discussion that once engrossed Jane when she wrote to Cassandra, asking her whether Anna was as tall as Fanny. The 'steady sense and sweetness of temper that adapted' 'Jane Bennet' as a general favourite with the four children of 'Mrs. Gardener,' was the same that adapted

Mrs Gardiner was
the year
1855

Jane Austen to entertain her nephews at Southampton, and allowed them after 'Psalms and Lessons' to amuse themselves by 'shooting paper ships with horse chestnuts.' And we know that when she wrote in *Emma* of 'little Bella' being recommended to Southend for her weak throat, the 'Palmery' children of her brother Charles were actually staying at this very place. That she ever broke a bootlace to manœuvre an introduction to a vicar, like 'Emma,' we doubt; that she dashed into the front room in Chawton and 'peeped through the blind' when Mr. Papillon – the bachelor curate of Chawton – passed, as 'Harriet Smith' did in 'Highbury' we could easily believe.

There was, we think, something of Mrs. Charles Austen in the character of 'Lady Middleton.' And in her pathetic picture of 'Mrs. Smith,' 'her accommodation limited to a noisy parlour and a dark bedroom behind,' who lodged in Westgate Buildings, there are traits of Miss Murden, 'friendless, captious, who talked so loud, and boarded in a neat parlour behind a shop, *à la* Southampton, middle of three deep,' whom Jane once befriended. We also see a striking resemblance between a Mr. Moore and his wife, with Charlotte Palmer and her husband in *Sense and Sensibility*. Mr. Moore, though quite gentleman-like, Jane thought, 'wanted tenderness in his manner towards his wife – though she never seemed unhappy.' 'Charlotte Palmer' and her mother, 'Mrs. Jennings,' saw only humour where others saw rudeness in 'Mr. Palmer,' whose 'studied indifference, insolence and discontent gave them no pain – they were highly diverted.' 'He is so droll,' said 'Charlotte.' 'Emma,' like Jane Austen, was sensitive. She was 'so quick in feeling the little injuries to Isabella which

Isabella never felt herself.' Really, Jane Austen is inexhaustible. There is hardly an incident in her life but infinite patience could discover its parallel in her works.

For her medical men, she had the family physicians, the Lyfords, father and son; her niece's Mr. Scud, her mother's Mr. Brown; and her brother's Mr. Haden.

For her governess, there was Miss Clews, Miss Atten, the insinuating Miss Bell, and her especially favoured correspondent, Miss Sharp.

And what of the denizens of the servants' hall? Lady Balfour's 'Hundred – Classic in their way as a Greek Chorus.' There was a butler in every mansion and under-strappers galore. There were bailiffs, housekeepers, coachmen, gardeners and nurses. Between Steventon Manor and Chawton Great House she had met them in countless numbers, at Stoneleigh Abbey and Godmersham. We know of Johncock, the butler at her brother's Kent home. There was John Bond, her father's 'factotum,' and Nanny Littlewart, who dressed her hair. Also the married maid-servants, who scrubbed and 'undertook their purification.' We know of the democratic John Binns, the coachman, and Lord Lansdowne's 'domestic painter,' not forgetting her brother Henry's French cooks. Though in real life their absence caused such grave concern to Jane, in the novels they just stand and wait. Though she mentions many, she obtrudes none. We know next to nothing of their characters. This much we know, however; had the Bennets ever got shipwrecked, their 'Admirable Crichton' would have to be a masterful man to bend the will of 'Elizabeth.' Though the eagle eye of 'Mrs. Norris' detected more than one bad servant, this much is certain; had 'Baddeley' shown any of the pilfering

propensities of 'Matey,' the unbending Sir Thomas would have sacked him with less ado than the 'kissing couples' at Meredith's Raynham. Mr. Hodges, Mrs. Reynolds, and Mrs. Whitaker had a great deal of authority and independence, but whether any of them were 'certificated lecturers against the snares of matrimony' as 'Mrs. Berry' was, or not, their influence in this direction does not appear to have carried much weight with their lovesick masters.

At this distance of time we do not pretend to recognise entire portraits of her contemporaries; she alone must be our arbiter. Her nephew may deny, her biographer disapprove, and her many admirers dispute it. Each to his opinion. She who chronicled the praise of her critics, having received so little of it, would not, we are sure, begrudge a few kindly smiles at the surmises of the posterity she has delighted. It is a subject of perennial interest to all students of life and letters. Even Thomas Hughes would not admit drawing fancy portraits of the friends of his schooldays in *Tom Brown*; but none will deny that each character is a composite, subtracted from and added to by traits and incidents memorised from others during that period. *Madame Gervaisais* was an aunt; and the original of *Germinie Lacerteux* was a servant of the de Goncourts. That rural Don Juan in *Une Vie* has been recognised as Guy de Maupassant's father; indeed it is known that Guy made no exceptions of his relations or his friends, but laid them bare with cruel impartiality, and dissected each as a corpse is dissected in a hospital. But whereas Maupassant, like Balzac, in not a few instances made a study of malignant tumours, and rummaged the cesspools of depravity for several of their characters, Jane Austen gave us at worst only the

innocent humours of a genteel society. It has been said that Tolstoy's works are to a great extent a chronicle of his own family, all his writings in fact, a 'monumental biography.' Nehludof and Bolkonsky, Peter Besoukhov and Anatole Kouraguine, were his familiars, flesh of his flesh, composites of his multifarious moods. And there is no doubt that Dostoevsky had tasted of the rich and 'fluid puddings' he has regaled us with. Gorki always used living persons; to portray a single priest, one workman or a shopkeeper, he observed a hundred such. George Meredith, 'who had been everything but a curate,' drew portraits whose doubles were distinctly envisaged, by those who knew him. To Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, Dr. Hotson has now added William Gardiner of Bermondsey as the original of Shakespeare's Shallow. And did not Sir Walter Scott erect a monument to Helen Walker, his prototype of 'Jeanie Deans'? And Bernard Shaw take Aveling as a model for his Dubedat in *The Doctor's Dilemma*?

We can only surmise that this curious little commonplace who lived demurely in a country village drew her portraits from those around her, and was disarmed from recognition by her innocence. As Sullivan drew apart from a crowded drawing-room to jot down a few bars of melody that had stolen in vagrant fashion across his mind, so did Jane in the intervals of housekeeping laugh composing, as the people she evolved came to life beneath her gaze. Nothing she wrote, however, could bring her discredit. The men we are sure could take no exception to her strictures, for, apart from one common weakness in most of her villains, the dividing line between better and worse is very thinly partitioned. The old women, perhaps, did they know it for certain, would

have been more wary and would think a lot, but the young of either sex had more to be proud of than sorry for. Among them there was at least one lady who would have said in other words what our *Punch* artist did convey when he said, 'I wonder if the people who make funny notes of the people who strike them as funny look as funny to the people who strike them as funny.' She was, however, less gracious. She called Jane a 'poker.' Our only consolation is that, in this instance, Jane was the butt of a little family spite meant for another.

There is one woman who, apart from Lady Susan, is indeed past redemption. Like Trollope's Mrs. Proudie, she was the wife of a 'man-vicar,' and like her again she was a 'type of female bully,' at all times a 'poking old woman,' who made up in cunning what she lacked in strength, and even that she did not lack. Mean, crafty, spiteful, always 'dictating liberality to others,' who spoke without being spoken to, who went without being wanted, and 'bustled without having anything to bustle about.' Childless herself, she spoilt the children of others, who were spoilt already, and worried a weakling, as no lady would worry a menial. 'Me? A poor, helpless, forlorn widow – health gone, spirits worse, peace destroyed, no support.' We can see her now, forcing soup when the Baronet wanted tea; chasing a second-hand button while the others were engrossed with shipwrecks; giving a pound with the air of twenty such; lecturing her niece on rank, or the gardener on his rheumatism, and foreboding rain while denying the carriage; saving half a crown here and two feet of green baize there; pinching the last roses of Mansfield Park only to dry them; and 'spunging' pheasants' eggs from Sotherton, which with luck she hoped to rear in a

'borrowed coop.' Given the chance, she ruled the household: butler, governess, cook, coachman, footman and carpenter. If she had a heart, it ached only for the horses; if she intended a present of two old second-hand prayer books, 'the ardour of generosity went off' during the act of taking down. In fact, she was the winter of the Bertrams' discontent and the bane of Fanny's life.

Aunt Norris: who is she, that all our swains abhor her?

To make this character, Jane Austen drew from many sources. We are convinced there was no one woman among her acquaintances who could supply all these shades and shadows, all dull and darkening. We are equally certain that two women in particular, both relations, an aunt and sister-in-law, could answer to not a few of the frailties she so scathingly portrayed, and they were Aunt Perrot and Mrs. James Austen. We have weighed in the balance all the nice things that can be gleaned in evidence sure and convincing of what the family thought and said of these two persons, and even admitting a certain amount of prejudice on their part, have come to the conclusion that in their hearts they really did not like them.

We leave out the will business which brought on Jane's relapse. Jane and Cassandra, always on the look-out for legacies, expected so much and were no doubt disappointed at receiving so little, and that deferred; a disappointment aggravated no doubt by their present distress. Be it said, however, that 'Aunt Norris' had left Jane's hands before this event which occurred to darken the last year of her life. But the family estimate of Aunt Perrot had been formed years

before. This was the aunt whose invitation to Bath 'was a kindness that deserves a better return than to profit by it.' Like 'Mrs. Churchill,' we believe 'she governed her husband entirely.' And the bad cough she had, which Jane writes Cassandra not to forget having heard about, was like Mrs. Bennet's nerves, 'old friends of twenty years at least,' and that she was deaf did not make her more amiable. 'She looked about with great diligence and success for inconveniences and evil,' and supposed that John Binns the coachman declined their offer of a place, 'because he will not wear a livery.' 'Whatever the cause,' writes Jane, 'I like the effect.' And again, 'In spite of my mother's long and intimate knowledge of the writer, she was not up to the expectation of such a letter as this; the discontentedness of it shocked and surprised her, but I see nothing in it out of nature, though a sad nature.' That after the death of James Austen she held the promised legacy with renouncing threats over the head of her great-nephew – his son – denied him entering the Church, and flattered him when he entered it, then worried him again, and lived on, not ten, as Jane predicted, but twenty years, to die at the age of ninety-two; this was a 'sad nature' indeed. After this, we really believe she was capable of anything, even of pilfering a bit of lace, for which she was confined in gaol, though afterwards found not guilty. Who can deny that in some respects Aunt Perrot was an excellent model to paint the impenitent 'Aunt Norris'?

The other was Mary Lloyd Austen; sister of Martha, and wife of Jane's eldest brother, James; mother of Austen Leigh, the writer of the *Memoir*, and stepmother of Anna Austen Lefroy, and what is more, the granddaughter of our alleged 'Lady Susan.' This was the

Mary 'who is still plagued with the rheumatism, which she would be very glad to get rid of, and still more glad to get rid of her child, of whom she is heartily tired.' Who after her confinement 'had no dressing-gown to sit up in, and whose curtains were all too thin'; and later, 'who is going to enter more into dinner parties.' Who at a ball 'behaved very well and was not at all fidgetty'; and at a wedding 'would find all the festivity she can in contriving for everybody's comfort, and being thwarted or teazed by almost everybody's temper.' This was the Mary who reproached her husband for his old tricks of visiting his parents too often. Who lived in the 'fields of Elysium'; and whose amusement it would be to superintend a young married couple in their household management, and abuse them for expense, especially as another meant to advise them to put their washing out. 'The perverse and narrow-minded woman' who would need a great deal of persuasion 'to oblige those whom she does not love.' The same 'who was more minute in giving accounts of her own gains,' and had 'little pleasure in books of any kind.' Who 'does not talk much of poverty now,' and was surprised at Cassandra drinking tea with the Maitlands, which surprise did not prevent Jane approving it. Indeed we are convinced also that despite their income of eleven hundred pounds, she lectured her husband out of any generosity to his mother and sisters as 'Mrs. Dashwood' did her John, and would have left them 'with a set of breakfast china.' We can hear her saying, 'They will live so cheap! Their housekeeping will be nothing at all. What on earth can three women want for?' Spread over many years, the above peculiarities of Mrs. James Austen had not struck us as of very great importance, other than the asides of

'humorous malevolence' sprinkled in letters between one sister and another, who were, in Jane's own words, 'Two formidables'; until a letter to Miss Sharp, written by her friend, Jane Austen, published recently in *The Times*, gave us quite a different impression. Having had the accommodation of her brother's carriage to convey her from Chawton to Winchester, a few months before she died, Jane writes, 'Now that's the sort of thing which Mrs. J. Austen does in the kindest manner! But still, she is in the main *not* a liberal-minded woman, and as for this reversionary Property's amending that part of her character, expect it not, dear Anne; too late, too late in the day.'

Two months after this was written, Jane was dead. There can be no doubt that in Aunt Perrot and Mrs. J. A., Jane Austen found many of the characteristics which she ingrained in Aunt Norris. And the fact that to Mrs. J. A., 'Aunt Norris' was the one character she 'particularly enjoyed,' lends piquancy to our views; she saw so much of herself, though perhaps she would be the last to admit it, for, like most of us, she had not the gift to see herself as Jane saw her. We write in no spirit of censoriousness of Mrs. James Austen, and think it no degradation in an author, and least of all Jane Austen, whose attenuated material had to be stretched out somewhat; she had so little of it, and used the nearest at hand and best known to her. If in Aunt Norris she did not give us the happiest delineation of nature's varieties, she gave us one aspect of its nastiness, prevalent throughout the ages. Within the inner circle, it is our privilege to think aloud of our friends. We say nasty things of others we dare not utter, knowing that they in turn say things equally nasty of ourselves.

Mary had her good parts, and many were the presents given by Jane and Cassandra, 'Offered,' as Jane once said, 'on the altar of sister-in-law affection.' Mary also, alternately with Cassandra, supported her in her last hours and saw her breathe her last. That Jane chose a few of her sister-in-law's worst faults to adumbrate the baser ones of Aunt Norris, we do not think anyone need take umbrage if another should surmise that his great-grandmother was a 'poking old woman,' an epithet applicable to most of us. As it is a weakness in authors to castigate their brethren, it cannot be derogatory to paint portraits of their nearest relations. Samuel Butler not only grinned at the death of Darwin, because among other things his grandfather was at loggerheads with Darwin's grandfather, but drew fancy portraits of his own family and proclaimed their foibles unblushingly to posterity. 'Old mop-whiskered Ibsen' jarred on Sir Walter Raleigh's nerves; and the sermons and prayers of R. L. Stevenson stuck in his throat. Jane Austen missed many acquaintances, but their death she did not regret. Had it not been for her letters, we would never have guessed this. These were asides on life which her works do not betray. She certainly did not shout them from the housetops, but whispered to Cassandra, with the proviso 'to keep all this to yourself' or 'between our discreet selves.' 'Some men,' as Dickens says, 'like bats and owls have better eyes for the darkness than for the light.' Jane was not one of these nocturnal creatures; she basked in sunshine.

Taking characters from real life was an occurrence well known and not unappreciated by Jane Austen. Writing to Cassandra after having read one of Egerton's works, she says, 'There are many characters introduced

apparently merely to be delineated. We have not been able to recognise any of them hitherto, except Dr. and Mrs. Hay, and Mr. Oxenden, who is not very tenderly treated.' And again, reviewing a novel of her niece Anna, she writes, 'They are not so much like the Papillons as I expected.' Of the hero, 'she was afraid he would be too much in the common novel style – a handsome, amiable, unexceptional young man – such as do not abound much in real life, desperately in love and all in vain.'

Of the material from which she fashioned her delinquents, there was Lord Craven, 'the only unpleasing circumstance' about whom was 'the little flaw of having a mistress now living with him.' She humorously described as a matter of joy that 'Lord Lucan had taken a mistress,' though such conduct on the part of 'Admiral Crawford' in one of her novels had vitiated the morals of 'Mary' and 'Henry' and was pronounced as 'vicious.' Indeed the 'matrimonial fracas' in the family of Mrs. Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*, which shocked even the ribald Mr. Price, when he read of it in his newspaper was an echo of the 'sad story of Mrs. P.,' as related to Cassandra in one of her sister's letters. 'I should not have suspected her of such a thing,' writes Jane. 'She stayed the Sacrament, I remember, the last time that you and I did. A hint of it, with initials, was in yesterday's *Courier*, and Mr. Moore guessed it to be Lord S.'

There was something of Mary Crawford, we thought, in 'the impudent Lady Sondes.' But Mr. Hubback recently in the *Cornhill* came to the conclusion that her character may be founded to some extent on Jane's admirer and sister-in-law, Eliza Hancock-Feuillide-Austen. Mary Augusta-Austen-Leigh, however, saw in

Mary Crawford and Mrs. Ferrars a hint of 'Lady Susan's unblushing worldliness and maternal hardness.' After giving us a true history taken from a family MS., whose details were familiar to Jane – no doubt derived from her talks with Martha – and on which she based her 'study from life' for the unfinished novel, *Lady Susan*, she adds, 'That this was so is also shown by a passage in one of her letters, perfectly comprehensible to those who are acquainted with the names and details belonging to the foregoing history.' In spite of much searching for this passage, we have been unable to discover it. Our only surmise is that Martha Craven, the mother of Martha Lloyd and Mrs. James Austen, before she married the Rev. Nowys Lloyd, lived at Enbourne with an Aunt Willoughby, 'having run away from her mother, whom family tradition alleges to have treated her badly.' That this Mrs. Lloyd, now a widow, died at Ibthorp only three months after the death of Jane Austen's father at Bath proves to us, apart from the tell-tale watermark, that it was during this period that Jane drew the alleged immature but daring portrait of 'Lady Susan' with Mrs. Lloyd in the character of this wicked woman's unhappy daughter 'Frederica.' We admit, however, that the watermark on this MS. of *Lady Susan* does not necessarily prove the date of its writing; as we know that the watermark of *Pride and Prejudice* was older by five years than the printing of that novel. But taken together with the death of Mrs. Lloyd, it does lend support to our assumption that this work was written mid-way between leaving Steventon and going to Chawton.

Of course, we can only surmise what Jane Austen may have known, but never told us. Why should she?

Mohenkishen Teng
B. A. (Hons)

To enter the realms of hypothesis in literature is more intriguing than chess to a grubber of letters. Muriel Trollope was indignant that Lord Hugh Cecil should dare to suggest that her grandfather's delineation of the Grantly family, as personified in the Archdeacon's three sons, was an 'allegorical satire of the Church of England.' Trollope himself has told us that the 'canvas should be crowded with *real portraits*, not of individuals known to the world or to the author, but of created personages impregnated with traits of characters *which are known*.' We cannot forbear asking, Known from whom? Well, real personages, of course, impregnated with traits of *persons known*. Who else? The leopard may lose his teeth, but his spots never. If traits are remembered when faces are forgotten, you cannot altogether obliterate the persons to whom those characteristics belong. There is so much of each of us in all the rest of us that you cannot paint one of us without using some of all of us, but in that one of us there is something more than is in the rest of us, in whom all the others will see the best or worst of each of us and know him. Jane Austen's canvas was a restricted one. She had not the seven-league boots of Dickens, plodding towards the Yorkshire Stingo, or skirting the grim walls of Coldbath Fields, or slept beneath the stars with a donkey in France, as R. L. S. did; nor trotted the globe from Iceland to Africa like Trollope. She who 'looked out for a sentiment, an illustration or a metaphor in every corner of the room' peeped also through the casement of her slender world and gave us vignettes held to nature with no less art than painting landscapes from a hill-top, or surging mankind from the pilasters of London Bridge.

We are convinced also that her place-names – apart from definite towns – do not represent positive places in particular, but are the composites of many, all known perhaps, but not necessarily segregated so as to be distinctly identified. We have tried, but even with an 'ordnance map and a pair of compasses,' as Mr. Farrar suggested, have failed to connect geographically any correct sequence of places with any confidence to say that, 'Highbury is Church Cobham to a mile; Pynes is Barton Park; Uppercross, Kellynch, Northanger are definitely localised.' That they may be found is possibly true, but that they are arranged in any concatenation we do not believe. Like Appleshaw, which Jane called 'that village of wonderful elasticity,' we sincerely think that in Steventon and Chawton and the villages that environ them, all the families so 'beautifully gathered together' were visualised by her within this happy circumference. Had she named them Lilliput, or Weissnichtwo, Erewhon or Stogpingum, it would have made little difference; all were variations fictitiously used to flavour the same dish. Chawton was the stage, her acquaintances the players, the same background did for every cottage, the same foreground for every hall, she just moved the steps, withdrew a piece of furniture and added another festoon. In a way, her travelling, if not wide, was extensive, and the time spent between places only a hundred miles apart would to-day find us in sunny Spain. But the depth of her observation and her knowledge of history would make up for all that. She had visited many scenes, conversed with many people, danced with lords, dined with squires, stayed at castles, slept in hostelries, shopped in the metropolis, stitched shirts for sea-captains, copied music, nursed the

sick, inspected a gaol and visited the poor. Withal, the outward habiliments of persons or places interested her only in so far as they mirrored the minds of the people she was portraying, and were used as pegs upon which to hang conversations. She loved place-names, and chose them with pride for their plainness and their beauty. If they were at hand, so much the better; that they pleased was all-sufficient. Not once – that we know of – did she resort to the trick of transposing letters and syllables of known places or give us omnibus impressions of others. There are no Wintoncesters or Christminsters, no Coketowns or Loamshires.

Writing to her niece Anna, she says, 'Newton Priors is really nonpareil. Your Aunt C. quite understands the exquisiteness of that name. Milton would have given his eyes to have thought of it.' It was in that spirit that Jane found her names; map in hand, she roamed at will, choosing those she liked best, caring little for the contour of hills, the 'petrified spars' of Derbyshire, the 'hedgerows' of Northampton, or whither led the highway. Did it matter? Did she care? Who cares? Carried on the wings of romance, who counts the milestones or worries about names? 'Highbury is composite,' says one. 'It is Esher, Cobham, and Leatherhead.' 'Leatherhead,' said our wonderful Mr. E. V. Lucas. 'Cobham,' said another. The first has its 'Vicarage Lane' and 'Common Fields,' the second its 'Pools and Pollards.' Norbury may be 'Donwell Abbey,' Thorncroft 'Hartfield,' but Cobham is nearer Box Hill. The 'Crown Inn,' says another, 'may be the Bear at Esher, the White Lion at Cobham Street; or the New Inn at Epsom,' when all the time it is, perhaps, the old Angel in Basingstoke market-place. Who knows? None

can say for certain. ' "Mansfield Park" is Easton Neston of Northampton,' says Lady Vaux of Harrowden. Yet Sir Francis Darwin tells us that the Master of Downing, by means of measurements, had proved it to be Easton in Huntingdonshire. 'Impossible!' says the Hon. Mr. Justice MacKinnon, 'Easton Neston is Towcester' – and now 'Cottesbrooke.' What are we to say or do?

Nothing is uninteresting about Jane Austen. Her persons and places give us unending delight. Little did she think of the conundrums she was setting us or the alternatives she used. The passages we have scanned and the pages we have turned. We *have* 'paid for our pleasure,' but it has kept us busy for many a day, and was well worth it.

All we know for certain is that Northanger Abbey is thirty miles from Bath, and Woodston the same distance from Northanger; that Fullerton is eight miles from Salisbury and Tetbury twenty-three miles from Bath; that Barton Park is four miles from Exeter, and one and a half miles to the valley of Allenham; that Cleveland was only a few miles from Bristol; that one mile divided Meryton and Longbourn, and there were twenty-four miles from there to Gracechurch Street. We know that Mansfield Park was only half the circumference of Pemberley, that there were ten miles to Sotherton, eight to Thornton Lacy, fifty yards from the hall door to the parsonage, and half a mile to where 'Aunt Norris lived'; that from Highbury to London was only sixteen miles, Box Hill seven, and that the Richmond Road lay half a mile away. Uppercross was three miles from Kellynch, seventeen to Lyme and fifty from Bath. And Sanditon one measured mile nearer London than Eastbourne. Upon such slender information we defy the most

imaginative to tell us, 'Here is Northanger Abbey; there is Fullerton; this is Norland and that is Barton Park. Longbourn lies here and Pemberly there. On this spot was Mansfield Park. This is Highbury, and that is Kellynch Hall.' None, however, will deny the beauty of their names or of those around. Among them: Oakham Mount and Sandrift Hill, High Churchdown and Broadway Lane, Donwell Abbey and Pulvis Lodge, Winthrop and Thornberry Park, Stanwix Lodge and Barton Cross, Ecclesford and Parklands, Mickleham and Abbey Mill. We know the topography of Hardy's Wessex; he has told us. Trollope himself gave us a sketch of Barsetshire. Jane, had she lived, might have given us the outlines of Chawsetshire.

If among the characters in Jane Austen's novels her biographers have discovered none but genteel idlers, we defy them to find any in her own family. Indeed we dispute their finding any even in her works. It was their loves and hates that interested Jane. Their diversions alone appealed to her. That she wasted no time with how they earned their living, does not signify that they lived without earning. With their occupations she was little concerned. If the comfort of most was assured, to conserve that, they were bound to strive. If brawn makes money, it wants genius to spend it wisely. With one or two exceptions, they enjoyed all the amenities of the life they were born to, and were preserved by the same heritage from dissipation.

The denizens of the Parks, Courts, and Halls occupy the stage for too short a period to warrant any such conclusions that their whole lives were necessarily vapid and void of anything heroic. Lady Bertram was the mother of four children; though she might not have

exercised the authority over them one would expect, we cannot blame her altogether for the aberrations of her daughters. If she did not guide them, she certainly did not push them. What happened was due as much to accident as to disappointment. She had not always been 'a slug.' Lady Catherine de Bourgh, though she had only one daughter, ruled many tenants and a large estate. To make a forced trip to Antigua in those days for business reasons was no sinecure to a home-lover like Sir Thomas Bertram. There is some excuse for Mr. Woodhouse, 'he had been a valetudinarian all his life.' The honour of knighthood had not been conferred on Sir William Lucas for nothing; he had made a tolerable fortune in trade. The Bennets were certainly not idle. To bring five daughters – and such daughters – into the world and educate them without the aid of a governess was no mean achievement. Then to marry them into such consequence. What better service to humanity could they achieve? Few mothers, whether they deserve it or not, have cause to be prouder than Mrs. Bennet. Henry Tilney's father, besides being a general, found work for a whole parish in his village hot-houses. Did not Sir John Middleton have 'continual engagements at home and abroad'? Hunting and shooting – along with his club at Exeter – were his recreations, and surely no one will grudge him his leisure. Where are the idle ones? No wife even without children could be idle. Mrs. Grant married a glutton, and deserves our sympathy. The fly in Mrs. Norris's ointment may have been the sick husband she nursed; had he been robust, she might have become our heroine rather than the villain that she was. Who knows? Despite Mrs. Allen's obsession for dress, she took care of Catherine Morland. Lady Russell did

all she could; Anne, who was nobody to her father and sister, was everything to her. And Mrs. Jennings mothered everybody. With such a family as she had, Mrs. Thorpe's hands were full. Really, no one could say that Lady Denham was an idler; she had buried two husbands, and besides taking charge of a poor cousin, she was a company promoter as well. Indeed, when we consider his subjection to an illiterate and miserly father, that William Collins, despite the self-conceit of a weak head, belonged to one of the universities, we must give him credit for some industry. Of the two Knightleys one was a farmer and a magistrate, the other a lawyer. Henry Crawford had been to Cambridge, and though a 'prodigious flirt,' before he was twenty had improved his estate beyond recognition and envied the happiness of others who looked forward to improving theirs. Mrs. and Miss Bates certainly had all their work cut out to make both ends meet without the addition of an orphaned grand-daughter, and even she, 'poor creature,' hoped to live by governessing. A squire, though well-to-do, has obligations; a clergyman, though he seldom preaches, has duties. Amongst the students whom Hogarth caricatured, there were exceptions. The education which Edmund Bertram received at Eton and Oxford had fitted him not only to be a parson; he could carve at table, talk to the steward, write to the attorney, and settle with the servants, and did all these so well that his father was never missed. Colonel Brandon was an authority on 'nabobs, gold mohrs, and palanquins,' and what is more, that he had served in the East Indies, where 'the climate is hot and the mosquitoes are troublesome,' we assume that he wore flannel waistcoats not so much for his rheumatics as for malaria. Darcy

must have had something else to do besides making love, to control the sources that gave him ten thousand pounds a year. And we may surmise that the master of Kellynch was equally busy retrenching the consequences of his extravagance. The sailors certainly earned their keep, and after the Napoleonic Wars, deserved all the leisure they got. And as for the young ladies, the enchanting beauties who fill these novels, if, as Mr. Walkley says, 'the only career open to them was marriage,' we dare anyone to call them idlers. Considering that men of independence, of sense and solidity had pined to possess them, what right has any man to arraign their industry or doubt their capabilities.

These are but a few of the genteel idlers we have *not* found in Jane Austen. We have yet to learn that if the 'men did not smoke,' they were necessarily unoccupied. Heroism has nothing to do with idleness, and we have seen that 'violent passion and tragic crime' are more often than not the wages of idleness. Had Mr. Cornish and Mr. Goldwin Smith been alive, would they have revised their estimate of Jane Austen's people and their influence on the progress of humanity?

There is this to be said of these novels; unlike the novels which Proust complained of, they do not 'wildly accelerate the beat of the pendulum.' You will not find 'a lover full of hope at the top of one page, and a bowed old man of eighty at the foot of the next.' On the other hand, though Jane Austen was a 'good knitter,' she did not, as Desmond McCarthy once soliloquised on Proust and Henry James, 'plough a field with a pair of knitting needles,' or 'take out a pack of hounds to hunt a rat.' And, needless to say, neither did she digress like Tristram

Shandy from his 'Aunt Dinah to the retrogradation of the planets of Copernicus.'

Has it ever been realised that these novels, far from being full-length portraits, are merely a phase, and that the most intimate in the lives of her heroes and heroines; the other characters are appendages. We never lose sight of the first; the others come and go. These are always with us; the others flit. But this is our point: none stay very long. Between Catherine Morland's departure for Bath and Tilney's declaration, the action of *Northanger Abbey* is but eleven weeks. From the death of Mr. Dashwood to the marriage of Elinor, *Sense and Sensibility* takes less than two years. From first to last, *Pride and Prejudice* is wholly dissolved between Michaelmas and Michaelmas. From the arrival of the Grants to the triumph of Fanny Price, the rich scenes of *Mansfield Park* occupy less than twelve months. *Emma* is but *one* crowded year of glorious life. 'Sweet Anne Elliot' at twenty-seven is autumnal, but *Persuasion* ends before she is twenty-eight.

Like Landor's trees, winter or summer was alike to them. Life in these novels is perpetual spring. To indict as idle the people who flutter in their pages is to question the gay ephemerality of the butterfly or the placidity of the Empusa. To his neighbours, Thoreau was idle, yet, judged by the standard of the birds and flowers, what did he say? To Edmund Gosse, the people of the period were a race apart, whose busy idleness was a mental repose, familiar to students of *Emma*. There was less vacuity in the life of Jane Austen and those around her than people who have drawn too hasty conclusions from her life and letters imagine. Indeed the barest summary of her various activities would dissipate at once any

haphazard generalities as to the emptiness of country life. Life may have been 'unelectric and untelegraphic,' but to those who rise with the sun and live quietly, such amenities are superfluous. She who had danced in ecstasy beneath the flickering light of candles, to the music of one violin, and was refreshed from a 'mere sideboard collation,' could extend her day with the same gentle glow and write masterpieces in peace without the raucous intrusion of telephones. We should be surprised to know that the absence of electric light, or any difficulty in locomotion would very much contract the interests or create monotonous habits in a genius like our Jane. After all the unalloyed joys of life are derived from little pleasures. Happiness is not comparative; a trip to Wembley causes no greater excitement than a fair at Alton to the people at Chawton.

There were no stars like Edinburgh street-lamps to Stevenson. But we are sure that permanent residence in Charing Cross would have made Jane Austen as sick as did the 'insipidities of Bath.' The rat that gnawed at the pit of Carlyle's stomach at Craigenputtoch still gnawed at Chelsea. 'Life, in ourselves, is everywhere life,' wrote Dostoevsky to his brother.

Jane Austen's preference was for the company of men and women rather than sights. If she visited a picture gallery, it was always a portrait that interested her. Though she played and sang, if she went to a concert it was the people she met, rather than the music she heard, that diverted her. In the theatre she was at home. Jane loved the human face glowing in the flesh, but she loved it best in the precincts of those whom she loved. Yet with such delightful companions, living and embryonic, prancing in her brain, how could she be

lonely? She found as much pleasure in the acting of Kean as Goldsmith did in Garrick, but the imitations of a country wag, or the antics of her many brothers in a Steventon barn had given her no less. Really we think that the greatest pleasure she derived in her excursions from home during the Chawton period was the joy of returning once again to develop her negatives in the busy tranquillity of blissful creation.

If she did not water the red huckleberry and yellow violet in dry seasons, like Thoreau, the preciousness of her leisure was brimful of family interest. That composition was at all possible 'with her head full of joints of mutton and doses of rhubarb' makes her life doubly interesting. Like 'Edward Ferrars,' 'a troop of happy villagers pleased her better than the finest banditti in the world.' She is the historian of Squiredom – serene, but not idle – 'Their homely joys and destiny obscure.' She but chronicles a phase in the life circle of the *genus homo* who flourished in rural mansions.

There are facets in prose and poesy that illuminate scenes of bliss, when for a few brief hours we breathe the serenity and savour of country life. Elegies strung with pearls, and anthems of mellow sadness. Epics of nature that ooze with sugared platitudes like *Walden Pond*, and idylls in prose like the *History of Selbourne*. Pæans to spring like *The Compleat Angler*, and anthologies of insect lore in the moralisings of Fabre. 'The smoke of their wood fires clings to the bough as dew upon the grape.' The works of Jane Austen breathe that spirit. What these men did for the fields and ponds, Jane did for men and women. She was the natural historian of the denizens who dwelt in Hall, Court, and Park, the lives and loves, the joys and sorrows, the courtship and marriage of

people who lived in the quiet eddies and backwaters of civilisation during the most troublous times in history. 'The eternal and universal humanity which belongs,' as John Bailey says, 'no more to her England of the Regency than to the Alexandria of Theocritus, the Rome of Horace, or the Paris of Molière.' As the 'lily ingests the dew, preordained to its refreshment,' so did Jane ingest the spirit of England. 'Remember that we are English, that we are Christians,' said Henry Tilney. 'John, how are you?' said George Knightley, 'in true English style, burying under a calmness that seemed all but indifference the real attachment which would have led either of them, if requisite, to do everything for the good of the other.' Jane loved England. 'English verdure, English culture, English comfort,' and above all, 'English delicacy towards the feelings of other people.' These are her own words, and who can doubt her sincerity?

That George Austen read Cowper to his family in the morning proves the depth of Steventon leisure to be real, when compared with the shallow simulacrums of present-day inanities. There was indeed as much variety in the life of the Austens as could be found in any like family, even in the metropolis. Each age creates the enjoyment best suited to its tastes. Men cannot judge the interests of to-day and compare them with the yesterday of long ago. Were the 'drawing-rooms so slumbrous' as 'Evoe' surmises?

> 'The horror of that memory,
> The faces proud and chill,
> (So Edward-ish and Emma-ry!)—
> It lingers with me still.'

Indeed, we doubt very much if any niece was brisker than Aunt Jane. Mr. Knightley's 'Books of Engravings' and 'Relatives Albuminous' were certainly eloquent distractions from the monotonous small talk of such as Mrs. Elton, but they were not the only distractions. Can we to-day really boast of anything so very superior? That the women had tambour frames, wove miles of fringe, and worked filigree, one must not too hastily conclude from this that country life was vapid. It is this very atmosphere that the wisest and best among us to-day are striving to capture, that is, if they ever lost it. Our mothers and wives at this very moment are making 'housewives,' weaving monograms in silk, creating butterflies from fish-heads, hammering candlesticks from pewter. Who could better Jane in making shirts? Who was more adept at overcast and satin-stitch, made neater muslin scarves, or a more fairy-like 'housewife'? Who could beat her at spillikins, who more marvellous at cup-and-ball? She was also storekeeper to the household; the larder keys were in her charge, though she lacked a privy purse; she kept the stocks of sugar, tea and wine, and her mother's laudanum. These were her diversions, necessary, useful, her contribution to the daily round of household work. But the serious business of her life was writing novels. As Shakespeare is first among dramatists, Milton the first among poets, Burke the first among orators, Addison among essayists, Gibbon among historians, so is Jane Austen the first among women novelists, and second to none, even among the men. Indeed, we might say of her what France said of Maupassant, she is 'the novelists' novelist.'

IX

SHRUBBERIES, KISSES, AND VILLAINS

If there was one thing Jane Austen loved above all else in her country houses, it was a shrubbery. Not one of her novels was complete without this useful adjunct. There were hot-houses, flower-gardens, lawns, bowling-greens and rustic seats; but the shrubbery was an object of veneration. 'The evergreen! How beautiful, how welcome, how wonderful the evergreen.' Thus rhapsodised Fanny Price. To have a shrubbery bestowed distinction on its possessor. It was a mark of gentility. Sir Walter Elliot could not object to Admiral Croft removing the many mirrors in Kellynch Hall; but the idea of the shrubbery being approached was abhorrent to him.

It surprised Mary Crawford that a country parson ever aspired to a shrubbery; she had not imagined such a thing. Indeed, Mr. Tomlinson, the banker, was indulged, in having a shrubbery, and a sweep. The first pleasure General Tilney could bestow on innocent Catherine Morland was to view the shrubbery. To old Mr. Woodhouse's 'benevolent nerves,' it was the confines of safety, beyond which he seldom ventured. It was the haven of tranquillity, where lovers sighed and sauntered in privacy. An angry Sir Thomas advised his niece to stay there an hour to 'reason herself into a stronger frame of mind.' The love-sick Marianne would

steal away into the winding shrubberies and dream of her fickle lover and Combe Magna. It was in the shrubbery that Darcy received a few hints as to the advantage of holding his prospective mother-in-law's tongue. And Bingley walked with Jane to 'avoid the confinement of an intrusion.' In their recesses, Elizabeth confided to Jane, and Jane to Elizabeth. Emma would go there for relief and for serenity. To the fretful Fanny it was an oasis. George Knightley followed to soothe, to counsel, and to hope for Emma. And Lady Susan paced the shrubbery for hours with Reginald, 'calling forth all his tender feelings.'

Did they all speak of love? They must have. Did they kiss? Jane is silent. In all her novels there is not one 'ephemeral intoxication of a kiss.' To an age where fiction on film and in book is inured to such flimsy contacts, it seems incredulous, to write a novel without one tangible 'messenger of love,' not even a platonic one. There are kisses of course, sixteen in all, and of shrubberies there are thirty-eight. We have counted them. It was no sordid quest. Indeed, to rummage thousands of pages for shrubberies and kisses only, would be to reduce romance to cheerless arithmetic. It were as impossible to look for four-leaved clover in a daisy-spangled meadow and not inhale the incense of a summer's day.

Mr. Walkley did nothing in vain. We but followed his example, and bettered the instruction by an addition of thirteen shrubberies. But there was no lovers' kiss. It was a curiosity of literature. There are faints and sighs, declarations and embraces. There is scandal and gossip, elopements and adultery. Of lovers' kisses there are none. No 'kiss of mastery' like d'Urberville's. No silence

kiss like Angel Clare's. No dream kiss as Little Billee thought he received from Alice. Not one burning kiss like Rochester's, or icy experiment of St. John Rivers. Nothing so unpremeditated as that fatal kiss of Jude's, so lengthy as that final kiss of Heathcliffe's, or so impulsive as Maria gave Shatov. We thought of the too susceptible Tupman kissing Rachel; of Meredith's 'Aurorean kiss'; of Landor's 'monument of a fault extinct,' and Petruchio's 'clamorous smack.' We thought of Arthur Donnithorne, like 'Eros himself, sipping the lips of Psyche,' and of Tom Jones kissing Miss Weston by deputy. You search in vain; there is nothing so ebullient in Jane Austen.

Willoughby the weakling kissed a cut lock of Marianne's hair, and the wicked Wickham, having stooped to folly, kisses the hand of Elizabeth. Sir Thomas Bertram kisses Fanny, and Fanny kisses her brother. Jane kisses her father, and Mr. Woodhouse kisses his daughter. The sullen George Knightly is the only lover who attempts to carry his love's hand to his lips, but even *he* lacked the courage to accomplish, and let it go.

There are kisses fraternal and kisses maternal; kisses frigid, respectful, formal. There is the tearful kiss of gratitude, of Marianne to Elinor, and the hand-kiss of grateful respect from Brandon.

As Nathaniel Pipkin pondered on the beauty of Maria Lobbs, and went down on his knees on the dewy grass, the Vicar of Highbury, drunk, followed Emma into the carriage, and before she could speak, 'he was ready to die if she refused him.' Did he, like Nathaniel, struggle for a kiss? When he seized her hand did he make prints upon it with his teeth, as Mr. Greville did upon the hand of Harriet Byron?

You will find no such oscular demonstrations in the pages of Jane Austen. Had she herself really been in love, would it have made a difference? Had she been in love as George Knightly wished Emma had been, and in some doubt of a return, would it have done her good? Would her ban on kissing be removed? Like Frances Burney we can never conceive Jane Austen choosing 'to lead, or have led so contagious an example.' Anton Tchehov sent Olga Knipper a 'kiss on the muzzle' by letter. Had the proffered kiss Jane once received by post been direct and not second-hand, would she have handed it over to another? No! even in her life there are no kisses that we know of; not even on the eyelids as Maria Bashkirtseff received at the Carnival. She could not enthuse on the doubtful bliss of what she had never tasted.

So in her works, she achieved her end without these suspicious apanages of love's young dreams. Knowing the character of some of her men folk we may think what we like, but our author says so much, sufficient for her purpose and no more. She had ample opportunities of watching in others the result of blunted delicacy, and of analysing the disappointments of selfish passion, without embroidering her novels with any such irrelevant details, or sloppy sentimentalities.

There are a good many weddings, but she does not describe one. A few of her lovers embrace, but if their hearts were sound, to kiss was redundant. If their principles were upright, an exhibition of kissing was an excess too ill-bred to receive the sanction of one so unceremonious. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, like Elizabeth Bennet, did divert her – absurdities she loved. A mere kiss, however, was too

prosaic, too vulgar. As loudness and coarseness were considered by the consequential Emma to be bad manners, we are sure that kissing to Jane Austen was disgusting. It was something to be assumed, not to be spoken of.

We see Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram trying not to embrace. 'Anne! my own dearest Anne!' said Captain Wentworth, and all suspense and indecision were over. 'Dearest, loveliest Elizabeth,' said Fitzwilliam Darcy. 'Time, my dearest Emma,' said George Knightly, and pressed her arm against his breast. 'My Fanny, my only sister,' uttered Edmund Bertram, and pressed her to his heart. The placid Edward Ferrars, the rheumatic Colonel Brandon, the deceitful Frank Churchill, the gallant Henry Tilney, may have done as much. All for love, but there is not one lovers' kiss.

'Eleanor, my own Eleanor,' said Mr. Arabin, and 'pressed his lips upon her brow – his virgin lips which had never yet tasted the luxury of a woman's cheek.' Dr. Slope received a box on the ear. But that was Trollope. As the image of that 'supersensible Parisian,' Claire de Cintre, in the ascetic rags of a Carmelite nun, rose before him, Christopher Newman kissed her white face again and again. But that was Henry James. There is nothing in Jane Austen so luxurious or so violent. Her heroes were all as chaste as Dr. Arabin – and though a few of them were 'a-tremble with the magic of forces greater than themselves,' not one could boast what Arnold Blettsworthy called his 'first sacramental act of intimacy.' But that was H. G. Wells.

All Jane Austen's heroines, major and minor, like Sophia Weston, 'loved a tender sensation.' But in spite of the 'wild volatility' of Lydia Bennet, the romanticism

of Catherine Morland, the selfish sagacity of the frivolous Misses Steele, the bewitching prettiness of Harriet Smith, Louisa Musgrave's 'obstinacy of self-will,' the innocence of Jane and the pert-proudness of Elizabeth Bennet, the sense of Eleanor and the sensibility of Marianne Dashwood, the sweetness of Anne Elliot, the dependency of Fanny Price, or the suspicious reserve of Jane Fairfax, not forgetting that adorable busybody Emma – however warm their affections – however 'rapid their imaginations in jumping from admiration to love, from love to matrimony,' though the heroes are lukewarm and the villains veneered scoundrels, Jane Austen does not waver from her resolve. There is nothing so banal as that second kiss of Handshut's in *Sussex Gorse*, or so innocent as Bassanio's casket kiss to Portia.

No emotion, however tender, however vile, is sealed with one pure or profane lovers' kiss.

If in her works you search in vain for lovers' kisses, there is a villain in every novel. Indeed, there are no heroes, as we know them; the heroines and what she calls the anti-heroes hold the foreground. Really, we might say that the villains love the heroines but elope with the secondaries, and the heroines in turn love the villains but marry the mediocrities. Willoughby loves Marianne, Wickham loves Elizabeth, Crawford loves Fanny, Elliot loves Anne, Emma loves Frank Churchill, Thorpe loves Catherine, Musgrave loves Emma Watson, Lady Susan loves de Courcy, Mary Crawford loves Bertram. In fact, she mildly apotheosises her villains, paints them in all the glowing colours of beauty, love, admiration, probity, and manliness. Maidens more fastidious than Portia did succumb to their manly charms. You are infected with her enthusiasms. Your

critical anticipations are lulled to sleep. She leads you on unwittingly to the very brink before she reveals her secret. This is one phase in the consummate art of Jane Austen – the art of concealment. She has the story-teller's unerring instinct of deluding the reader as to the true motive of her characters. We know of few writers who so artlessly achieve this distinction. Like the 'respectable Dr. Marchmont' she once complained of, her lovers were kept apart for the equivalent of five volumes. We defy any reader to predict that Elizabeth's prejudice would blend with Darcy's pride. That Fanny Price would be the wife of Edmund Bertram. That Henry Tilney would follow Catherine Morland. That Elinor would ever marry Edward Ferrars. That Frederick Wentworth would 'spread his canvas' and persuade the sweet Anne Elliot to be his wife. Or the busy Emma, so positive, so precise, would marry George Knightley. That Marianne would 'submit to the office of nurse' and marry a man old enough to be her father. That Frank Churchill would marry Jane Fairfax, Lady Susan Sir James Martin, or Emma Watson Mr. Howard.

Those whom she loves, she first chastises. Chills your admiration with her cold ablutions. Steeps them with implacable resentment. An atmosphere of wilful misunderstanding shrouds their characters; their faults are magnified, their motives misconstrued, their weaknesses are unmasked. She views them from the most unfavourable angles, in the cold light of prejudiced reason. All is vanity, infirmity, insensibility, stolidness, mediocrity – everything antithetical to the villains. Who could love them? In all but virtue they are what the anti-heroes are not. Virtue, however, was their cynosure, they have no moral interstices, no fatal flaws. Sturdy

independence, goodness of heart, openness outshone all romantic attributes. In fiction and in life Jane Austen preferred solid wisdom to witty genius, common sense to clever levity. In the order of their weaknesses, as they first impress us, there are Darcy, Brandon, Ferrars, Knightley, Bertram.

The villains taken as a whole are really not so bad, but taken out of their contexts, as it were, they are indeed of a most unprincipled type. To parody the memorable lines of Macaulay on Jane Austen's clergymen, we might say: There are for example six villains, none of whom we should be surprised to find in any mansion in the kingdom. Crawford, Wickham, Willoughby, Elliot, Churchill, Denham. They are all specimens of the middle class. They have all been liberally educated. They all chafe under the same restraints. They are all in love. They are all young. All are liars. Each one has a ruling passion, such as we read of in Pope. All are scamps such as the old aunt in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* lectured her nieces to avoid. As 'Don Quixote's heart grew stronger when he grasped his lance,' to use a phrase of Trollope's, so did these villains purr at the sight of woman. Who would not have expected them to be insipid likenesses of each other? No such thing. Old Goriot is not more unlike Cousin Pons, Nick Garraty is not more unlike Sir Clement Willoughby, Captain Blifil is not more unlike Lord Mountfalcon, than every one of Miss Austen's young rakes to all his deceitful brethren.

Henry Crawford differed only in degree but not in kind from Stendhal's Julien Sorel. Unlike him, however, he was the gentleman, with Westminster, Cambridge, and four thousand a year to make him in air and

manner both lively and pleasant. He was in more ways than one considerably the best actor of all; and 'could be so polite, so seriously and blamelessly polite.' He was the horrible flirt who claimed as many lovers as the Egyptian princess we read of in *Gil Blas*. If we believe his sister, it required the address of a Frenchwoman, as English abilities had failed, to coax or trick him into marriage. Indeed, he toyed with maiden hearts, as a cat plays with a mouse. To him 'an engaged woman is always more agreeable than a disengaged.' He passes over Julia to be the 'clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria.' He was the confident braggart who gave himself a fortnight to gain the admiration of Fanny Price, and would 'not be satisfied without making a small hole in her heart.' He 'loved to excite the first ardours of her young unsophisticated mind,' and was determined to make her love him. As he strove to break this 'unconquerable young lady of eighteen' whose pre-engaged heart he chose to attack – her attractions increased. She grew in height and beauty, 'her *tout ensemble* is so indescribably improved.' 'How the pleasing plague had stolen on him, he could not say.' Fanny, however, was adamant; 'she did not love him, could not love him, was sure she never would love him.' Henry was shocked, he plotted like a calculating connoisseur, explored every loophole and studied every mood that might persuade her to his will. He examined the ship news, negotiated her brother's promotion, extolled Shakespeare, glowed over the liturgy. All for love. This was the way to Fanny's heart. She spurned him. Dependent and poor though she was, she could neither be coaxed, cajoled, or bullied into accepting the hand of one whom she profoundly mistrusted. For once

in his life Crawford was chagrined and humiliated. The little creep mouse had triumphed. The cat, however, persists. Though apparently reformed, his vices were but dormant, and 'entangled by his own vanity' he succumbs at last, not so much to the charm of Mrs. Rushworth, as to 'the repelling coldness which mortified him.' He could not resist subduing so proud a display of resentment. The 'blunted delicacy and corrupted vitiated mind' that disgusted Edmund Bertram in Mary Crawford, impelled the vainglorious Henry into committing a 'sin of the first magnitude – a confusion of guilt; too gross a complication of evil, for human nature, not in a state of utter barbarism, to be capable of.' He not only blasted his hopes of gaining Fanny's heart; he disrupted the happiness of several families.

George Wickham is a small edition of Maupassant's Duroy. At first, a self-imposed martyr, he turns out in the end to be a plausible and unprincipled rogue of vicious propensities. Intended for the Church, like Captain Blifil he chose the church military, and was, like him, 'as great a master in the art of love as Ovid.' He was the 'happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned.' Even Elizabeth thought him the most agreeable man she had ever seen; indeed amiability was written on his countenance. By specious advances he ingratiated himself into the esteem of others by lies. An impecunious and dissipated idler, 'profligate in every sense of the word, with neither integrity nor honour, as false and deceitful as he was insinuating.' A fortune-hunter who would have abducted a child of fifteen for her money, and to spite the family whose hospitality had nurtured him. Elizabeth Bennet's

'incautious preference for him,' he side-tracked for another, when he discovered she had no money, though ultimately, like the gamester that he was, he eloped with her flippant silly sister, a girl of sixteen – out of bravado, or the same yellow streak of cowardliness. To add insult to injury and disgrace, he bargained like an unscrupulous usurer, for the highest price. His debts must be paid, his commission must be purchased, his livelihood must be assured, before he consented to marry her, and even afterwards he lived on the bounty of his relations.

John Willoughby had youth, beauty, and elegance, such as Marianne's fancy had drawn for the hero of a favourite story – the chivalrous knight who rescued females in distress. All that imagination could delineate was Willoughby's. A decent shot, a bold rider, he loved books and music, was a good conversationalist, and would even cheat at cards to give his lady-love a good hand; could dance from eight till four without sitting down, and was up again at eight to ride to covert. All was gilt. To be so richly endowed and yet so foul and false. Beneath so glittering an exterior, he suffered what Rabelais called the 'pricking stings of sensuality.' He left the orphaned child whose youth and innocence he had seduced, unprotected, and in the utmost distress.

He was the 'hard-hearted rascal.' A 'scoundrel of a fellow, a deceitful dog.' An unprincipled knave, depraved, expensive, dissipated, and worse than both, a trifling libertine. He sported with Marianne's affection, tricked, avoided, and left her mourning at death's door without one word, to marry a wealthy heiress. His ruling principle was selfishness. Though he had courage

enough to fight a duel, he could not withstand his prospective wife's malice, who, like Metsu's *Jealous Husband*, dictated his letters; and to appease her passion, he signed what he was ashamed to put his name to. Later, coward as he was, he professed contrition, and 'would have suffered under the pecuniary distresses which, because they are removed, he now reckoned as nothing.'

Of the same brood is William Walter Elliot, heir to the baronetcy of Kellynch Hall. He was the complaisant villain. 'Everything united in him; good understanding, correct opinion, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart. He was steady, observant, moderate, candid – his manners so polished, so easy, so particularly agreeable – undoubtedly the gentleman.'

Sweet Anne Elliot soon found, however, that Sunday travelling was the least of his bad habits. He would have sold his baronetcy for fifty pounds, arms and motto, name and livery included. He married the daughter of a grazier – not for love, but to purchase his independence; after first being secured of the real amount of her fortune. His ingratitude and inhumanity to the stricken widow of a friend whose purse he had drained, 'no flagrant open crime could have been worse.' He was a 'disingenuous, artificial worldly man, rational, discreet, polished, but he was not open – this was a decided imperfection.' A man 'without heart or conscience, a designing, wary, cold - blooded being, totally beyond the reach of every sentiment of justice or compassion – black at heart, hollow and black.' His whole life one of duplicity and treachery, who for his own interest would be guilty of any cruelty. Balked in his designs on Anne, he makes sure of his baronetcy by

making Mrs. Clay his mistress, in spite of 'her freckles, projecting tooth, and clumsy wrists.'

Frank Churchill was the deceitful villain, young, proud, luxurious, selfish; 'with no English delicacy towards other people.' A very weak young man, who wrote flourishing letters full of professions and falsehoods. Having induced the most upright female mind in the creation to stoop to a secret engagement, he 'flirted excessively,' even in her presence, with another, to delude his friends and relations of his attachment. Travelled twice sixteen miles over, under the pretence of having his hair cut; when in fact his errand was to buy a pianoforte for his betrothed; which transaction only complicated his guilt and surrounded her in an atmosphere of abominable suspicion. He was the eavesdropping villain, whose smooth plausible manners drew others to express sentiments they would never have uttered had they known his warm predilection to the person scandalised. He carried on 'a system of hypocrisy and deceit, espionage and treachery, with such profession of openness and simplicity, and such a league in secret to judge us all.' 'None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness.' 'He was a disgrace to the name of man.' The 'abominable scoundrel' whose understanding was perverted by mystery – finesse.

Sir Edward Denham was the seductive fop who felt he was bound to be a dangerous man – quite in the line of the Lovelaces. Loved 'novels that display human nature with grandeur – such as exhibit the progress of strong passion from the first germ of incipient susceptibilities.' He was the champion of 'illimitable

ardour.' His hero 'must hazard all, dare all, achieve all, though at the risk of some aberration from the strict line of primitive obligations.' With such loose thinking, and such dilettantism, there is no wonder that Miss Heywood thought him 'downright silly.'

Tom Musgrave was a trifler; a flatterer, 'very vain, very conceited, absurdly anxious for distinction.'

John Thorpe was the liar, the vulgar young fool.

In Lady Susan we have a 'vamp' of the worst kind, an evil presence that defiled. Like Maria Edgeworth's Lady Isabel,

> 'Two passions alternately govern the fate,
> Her business is love, but her pleasure is hate.'

As a wife she neglected her husband and encouraged other men. As a widow she abused the hospitality of a family whose shelter she had sought in her apparent distress. Not only did she steal the husband's love, but robbed his daughter also by flirting with her lover, under the pretence of matching him with her own daughter; but would have married him herself had he been 'one degree less contemptibly weak.' She had everything to commend her, beauty, symmetry, brilliance, grace; and eloquence 'too often used to make black appear white.' Her 'countenance was absolutely sweet, her voice and manner winningly mild.' Never was a woman more ingratiatingly endowed with all the outward attributes of female loveliness. Yet at heart she was vile. Such gloss; such putridity. Having ruined one family, she plaintively insinuates herself into the household of her brother-in-law, whose hostility she had once earned by her efforts to thwart his engagement. Her

dangerous abilities were common knowledge. Having imposed upon the husband, she plans to win her sister-in-law's heart through her children. Before very long this very sister-in-law's brother, attracted to the scene by this 'most accomplished coquette in England' – though forewarned – succumbed to her many charms. The astuteness of thirty-five was pitted against the innocence of twenty-three. His wealth alone attracted her; she could not love him. His affection won, she derives exquisite pleasure in subduing his proud spirit. With 'intentions of absolute coquetry she represses by the calm dignity of her deportment his insolent approach to direct familiarity, though her desire of dominion was never more decided.' Certain manœuvres in her conduct make him suspicious; she, however, regains his confidence by cajolery, and coldly 'watches the variations of his countenance – to see the struggle between returning tenderness and the remains of displeasure.' She is impelled by conflicting motives 'whether to punish him by dismissing him at once, or by marrying and teasing him for ever.' She would punish her daughter for 'giving indulgence to her whims at the expense of her mother's inclination,' and 'torment her sister-in-law for the insolent triumph of her look.' Her vices, however, did not desert her. Though still professing her love for this youth, she could not resist the prurient charms of the man whose family she had robbed of its peace. Like Lucifer, she fell. This guilty liaison proved her downfall. Her designs now despoiled, she marries the wretch whose weakness she once despised. With only her husband and her conscience against her, she had left behind a trail of unhappiness, strewn with victims of her wickedness. In her callous

nature there was no consciousness of guilt. Indeed to compare with such a woman, Madame Bovary was a saint; no man's enemy but her own.

The novels of Jane Austen have, what Trollope said it was ordained all novels should have, a male and female angel, and a male and female devil.

Though it was sweets to the sweet to the angels, as to the devils, she does not exaggerate the consequences of guilt. No one knew better that 'in this world the penalty is less equal than could be wished.' Like the family of Slopes we read of in *Barchester Towers*, they never starve, they always fall on their feet like cats, and live on the fat of the land. But 'without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter,' she does not contrive even by the elastic laws and licences of fiction to correct this injustice. Her friends did not always 'taste the wages of their virtues,' or her foes 'the cup of their deservings.' That man was inconstant did not make her in mind more accessible to any principle or desire of revenge. Causes were not wanting to extenuate somewhat the most heinous offences. In one novel we find that 'natural folly, even imbecility in a beautiful girl, was a great enhancement to personal charm.' To Jane no less than Emma, 'wickedness is always wickedness, but folly is not always folly.' Wickedness, Jane Austen never temporised with. Mary Bennet, with her strait-laced observations of threadbare morality, was an object of satire. So was Mrs. Bennet an object of disgust, with her 'want of shame in being more alive to the disgrace of her daughter's want of new clothes, than her eloping and living with a man for two weeks, before her nuptials took place.'

'Unintelligibly moral people' she had no patience

with. 'Pictures of perfection made her sick and wicked'; she told us so. In such persons, these were weaknesses; the attributes of 'bending little minds,' offences against common sense. That Mr. Collins could change from Elizabeth to Jane – and from Jane to Charlotte – 'done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire,' was despicable; unforgivable in a clergyman. Stains of 'illegitimacy, though unbleached by nobility,' she could not despise, but faults of principle were contemptible. Her scorn is reserved for cruel gaiety; for cold-hearted ambition. Mary Crawford reprobating the detection rather than the offence of her brother's crime; the ambitious levity of her suggestion to bribe Tom Bertram's physician; Lady Susan's callous wish that Sir Reginald would soon die. Isabella Thorpe and Lucy Steele could do no worse: but they were silly. It was all for love. Only vitiated minds could stoop to such expedients. These were the faults our author held up, not only to derision but to obloquy. Yet somehow, in life and letters, she was 'impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort.' And even for the rest she had some regretful regard. Her forgiving heart could never allow rankling animosity to dwell for long within its generous precincts. Their greater punishment she consigns to the deity; she leaves them to vexation, self-reproach, regret, wretchedness, and presumed that even the most vicious had in their composition some tincture of penitence. Those whom she had once cherished with admiration, if she found them wanting in principle, were temporarily ostracised. With Attic eloquence withering in its cold logical severity, she pours scorn and contempt, in perfect and lucid sentences, in language that could not be improved. She 'recapitulates

the particulars of past sad scenes – all the minutia of distress upon distress – pity for them was all over.' She dwells on their 'unwelcome obtrusiveness – the irremediable mischief done.' The chill of Dante's frozen circle hangs about them indeed. Adultery, though by no means exonerated, was to some extent condoned if the culprit showed signs of genuine penitence. Henry Crawford's sin, however, was against the Holy Ghost; his moral lapse was unforgivable. 'A compliance, a compromise, an acquiescence in such conduct as his was loathsome.' Nothing so libidinous could be laid at Mrs. Norris's door. Her sin was one of spitefulness, nothing but spitefulness. Her presence was an 'hourly evil.' 'Not even Fanny had tears for Aunt Norris, not even when she was gone for ever.' To deserve such a fate, is to be pitied indeed. We know of no character in all Jane Austen's work so irredeemable.

In the end, however, her heart triumphs; her purpose achieved, if she does not bring them back to the fold; suppliants are not wanting to soften, to temper, and to plead even for the wicked and the uncharitable.

Henry Crawford was a man of sense. Lady Susan could be kind. Elizabeth Bennet gave Wickham her hand to kiss. And even Elinor Dashwood, for a moment, wished Willoughby a widower. No worse punishment is meted out to young Elliot than the possibility of his being wheedled into making Mrs. Clay his wife. Emma Woodhouse shook hands with Churchill and wished him joy. Though Pemberley was polluted, Lady Catherine de Burgh was reconciled; and even the hard-hearted Mrs. Ferrars, if she did not kill the fatted calf, received again her prodigal son. Indeed, the loyalties of Aunt Norris herself were not forgotten.

To Stendhal, a novel is a mirror which goes out on the highway, sometimes it reflects the azure of the heavens, and sometimes the mire of the pools. Truth, however, is a diamond of many facets. The novel, as held in the hands of Jane Austen, mirrored a world as reflected through a mind that was singularly free from bias. She approached her work solely as an artist, and as novel-writing was her hobby, she took to it without any ulterior motives of being an instrument of social salvation, or as a conduit of escape from the meaningless chaos of existence. She had no need to keep in mind the self-laudatory 'Ifs' with which Richardson prefaced *Pamela*. The beauty of virtue and the divine power of grace were hers by birth and upbringing. There are those who, reading her works, see Repentance – retribution for some thoughtless or heedless act – writ in large letters on every page. There are others who see Consequence, or social snobbery permeate every novel. They may be right. We do not think Jane Austen ever thought of such things. She was a kind judge. This much is certain; if the uprightly were all rewarded, the downrightly received no worse punishment than not achieving their nefarious and ambitious ends. Most of her characters have what may be called a nuance; good and bad mingle more or less in the nicest proportions. None are all good, few are all bad. Really, apart from the single bad act, which, as Fielding says, no more constitutes a villain in life, than a single bad act on the stage, we could say that there are no deep-dyed villains, as there are no sainted heroes in Jane Austen. There are no bleached skulls, or dried-up human hearts; no monsters dressed in satin, lies around which are cleverly twisted gauze and silk. No disreputable scoundrels

obsessed in wickedness. To love and be loved have no gross physical meaning, sensuality there is none, or lewdness with its familiar garrulity. Shocks there are, and mild sensations not a few, but there is nothing shocking. That Jane Austen was a 'bit of a precisian' we know, a prude she was not. She saw life in the white light of the noonday sun, and found it, if not faultless – wholesome. She just peeped into the crevices of depravity and stayed neither too long nor too close. Her descriptions are all so chaste. These are our first impressions. But our second thoughts are, that she closed her eyes and ears only after seeing and hearing all she wanted to see and more, and wrote less than she knew, knowing at the same time that the curious reader would surmise her knowledge of the whole in knowing so much; and really what did she not know?

She does not follow Colonel Brandon into the spunging house, where the object of his first love, reduced to harlotry by the inconstancy of her husband and the tyranny of his father, had been confined for debt. Or accompany Willoughby to the scenes of his guilty seduction of a moral weakling. A few lines were sufficient to detail Wickham's wicked designs in Ramsgate. Indeed all the perturbations and hysterics of the Bennet family are gone through to the minutest whisper, together with Mary's moral reflections, and Mr. Collins's comforting comparisons; but of Wickham and Lydia's pre-nuptial joy-ride for a fortnight in London – hardly a word. We know every line in the character of Henry Crawford, but the scene of his triumphant adultery in a Twickenham cottage is left to conjecture. William Elliot stands before us in all his imperfections; but she does not follow him or his

mistress to London, or 'suck in through the conveyance of a keyhole,' like Bridget Allworthy, the scene of Reginald in Lady Susan's dressing-room. We can quite understand Fanny Price's astonishment at the impropriety of *Lovers' Vows* being chosen for home representation, the situation of Agatha and the language of Amelia, 'so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty.' You have only to read this play to find how interwoven is its plot with that of *Mansfield Park*. Upon the authority of Austin Dobson, an exacter translation of *Das Kind der Liebe* would be the *Love Child*. 'The whole subject of it was love.' This, however, you would never guess on a first perusal of Jane Austen's work. Here lies the greatness of Miss Austen, everything is sweetness and light. What Vermeer is to art, Jane Austen is to literature. The quality of truthfulness as reflected in her mirror shines on the primrose path of homely existence. The same quality in Hogarth gives us the mire of the pools – in Jane Austen the azure of the heavens. With exceptions, one reflects unruffled serenity, the other the contortions of sordidness.

X

HEROINES AND HEROES, DISCIPLINE, BORES AND CLERGYMEN

THERE is no doubt that the heroines of Jane Austen are the most feminine in fiction. They were certainly not spoilt; five are chosen from families consisting of eighteen daughters with only three sons, and the other three from households numbering between them thirty-three children. In all her novels the women predominate throughout; the female heart was indeed Jane's pet domain. She could have said with Lady Blandish, 'We are the lovelier vessels. Men are seedlings; Women – slips.' There are butterflies and minxes, prudes and tomboys, sluts and sulks, all the synonyms and antonyms of female capriciousness. With so exquisite an assortment of eligible and elegant young ladies, we might guess what a world of matrimony would be in store for us, and were not disappointed. To detail their flutterings, even for the few months – the one crucial chapter of their lives – would mean transcribing the novels complete. There are a score of original portraits, each distinct in character and temperament, as their noses differed in shape and comeliness. Elizabeth is as different from Jane as Lydia is from Mary. Emma from Isabella, as Harriet is from Jane Fairfax; Elinor from Marianne, as Lucy Steele from her sister; Fanny from Miss Crawford as Julia is

from Maria; Anne from Elizabeth, as their sister is from Louisa Musgrave. Catherine is as unlike Isabella Thorpe as both are to Miss Tilney.

If most of her villains are *sans peur*, all her heroines are *sans reproche*. All of a piece, yet none alike. There are as many mutations in their characters as Bach found tones in a 'G' string. Yet given one descriptive adjective, we would know each one, as we know a *red* rose. Of them, Jane Austen expresses every sentiment; weighs every mood; analyses every motive. She is both judge and advocate. Try to paraphrase her; you cannot. She defies 'translation.' There is nothing you can say of any of her characters she has not said and said more gracefully before you. Rummage your vocabulary as you may, she has expressed all that can be expressed in language ineffable and exquisite. There is not in literature a more delightful set of husband hunters than these young women. Rich or poor, to wed was the cynosure of their existence; though to most of them it was the 'pleasantest preservation from want.' If Emma was affluent and the Miss Bertrams rich, Fanny and Jane Fairfax were poor and dependent; one was little better than a lady's companion, the other a poor governess. The three daughters of Sir Walter Elliot were more or less impoverished. And as incomes go, we have the five penurious daughters of Mr. Bennet, along with the three fatherless Miss Dashwoods. To be an old maid had no terrors in theory for Emma. She was 'the princess paramount'; but the poverty of the others would certainly make celibacy contemptible not only to a 'generous public,' but in their own eyes. In order of merit, we would place Anne before Elinor, Fanny before Jane Bennet; Elizabeth before Emma; Catherine

Morland before Marianne Dashwood, and Emma Watson before Charlotte Heywood. But given the choice of a wife, Elizabeth Bennet would head our list; failing which, Anne would be our preference, then Elinor perhaps, though Emma would suit us just as well. Indeed we love them all so much that it would serve our purpose equally as well if we reversed the process. In our hearts, however, we will take Jane Austen, and possess them all. Elizabeth had wit, Anne had patience, Elinor was gullible, Emma was entertaining, she had what was Mrs. Bennet's idea of good breeding, 'something to say to everybody.' If Jane liked Elinor, and Emma was a heroine after her own heart, and 'Anne too good,' though 'no one so capable,' Elizabeth was 'her own darling child,' and is ours also. Who could not love such a 'mixture of sweetness and archness'? 'In the novels of the last hundred years, there are vast numbers of young ladies with whom it might be a pleasure to fall in love; there are at least five with whom no man of taste and spirit can help doing so. I should have been most in love with Beatrix Esmond and Argemone Lavington. For occasional companionship I should have preferred Diana Vernon and Barbara Grant. But to live with and to marry, not one of the four can come into competition with Elizabeth Bennet. She belongs to the allegro division of the army of Venus.' This is the judgment of George Saintsbury, the doyen of English letters, and we know of no just cause or impediment that can alter this decree, and declare it.

If in her life and letters 'her single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor,' she took good care to correct this unfortunate anomaly by providing

plenty of single young men in possession of a good fortune, who must be in want of a wife. Incongruous marriages there are, but the unhappy ones are not of her making. All her heroes and heroines meet in conjugal bliss.

'Not allowing them to be happy, together, when they are married,' she once said, 'it really is too bad.' And she took care that no one should be in a rage after reading her novels, as she was herself after reading *Olympe et Théophile*.

Of those whom we might call the heroes of Jane Austen, apart from the four clerical lovers – though in the generally accepted sense, we really could never call George Knightley or Colonel Brandon heroes – there are Fitzwilliam Darcy, Mr. Bingley, and Frederick Wentworth. That she knew her men folk only from the outside, we do not agree. After all, even to a spinster brought up in a household of brothers, does man in essentials differ so much from woman? Do their hearts not beat and their pulses not flutter? Are they not warmed by the same sun, cooled by the same winter? Do they not laugh, weep and pine? They differ in nought but the accident of sex; their yearnings are the same, their secrets no different, their hopes equally as sanguine, their disappointments just as painful. 'My son was myself,' said George Sand, 'therefore much more woman than my daughter, who is an imperfect man.' There is really nothing esoteric in the soul of man or woman that each could not surmise from the other. Is there anything in the works of George Eliot to prove that the writer was a Mary Ann? Would anyone surmise from *Jane Eyre* that Currer Bell was a Charlotte?

Indeed champions are not wanting to prove that the *Odyssey* was written by Nausicaa, and *Wuthering Heights* by Branwell Brontë. Is there anything in *Mansfield Park* to guide us that *Miss* Jane Austen was not a *Mrs.* Ashton Dennis? We sometimes think, that like Tiresias, one can be a man, and have recollection of having been a woman, or, if you will, the contrary. That in Jane Austen you will never discover two men together, whatever that may mean; does it signify that the three women of Steventon, and curious Jane in particular, did not or could not divine the conversation between the many men who were continually together and constituted their family? Jane Austen certainly knew her men, black and white, inside out. Was it books, knowledge, or intuition, that prompted her to hold on fast to the door knob when she found herself alone for ten minutes with Mr. Holder?

In any case, her lovers are indeed charming men. All are rich, one or two beyond the dreams of avarice. One is dependent upon the whims of his mamma, and two upon the bounty of their fathers. One was a yeoman farmer, and one a retired colonel. Some are born rich, one achieves riches, and several live in hope of having riches thrust upon them.

Mr. Darcy had everything desired in this world; he was tall, handsome, of noble mien; had ten thousand pounds a year, and Pemberley, with its library and ten-mile park. For Elizabeth Bennet he would have given all; and did in the end. If he was proud and she was prejudiced, the fluctuations of both in the esteem of each other gives such pleasure as fifty perusals of *Pride and Prejudice* could not exhaust. Mr. Bingley, the squire of

Netherfield, had five thousand a year, and acted, in some respects, to Darcy as Gratiano to Bassanio.

In common sense, there is in all Jane Austen's novels no man who shines like George Knightley of Donwell Abbey. We are sure that he was a man after Jane's own heart. His polite rebuff to the vanity of Mrs. Elton as to the invitation of his guests is a masterpiece of gentlemanly refusal. His gravity was needed to curb the gossipy tongue of Emma, his sobriety gave ballast to the sanguinity of her nature. The love of Emma for this man, along with her other busy adventures, is what makes this novel, in the words of a gentleman from far away Tibet, 'unexhausted and inexhaustible even to the ninety-ninth reading.'

Colonel Brandon was an absolute 'old bachelor,' on the wrong side of thirty-five. To the flippant Willoughby he was 'just the kind of man whom everybody speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see and nobody remembers to talk to.' That he wore flannel waistcoats and complained of rheumatism, however, did not disable him from challenging this young scoundrel to a duel, to punish his heinous conduct. Early disappointment in love having embittered his soul, though it gave him just cause for misanthropy, only added zest to his admiration of women. Unblemished himself, to the faults of others he was tolerant. His heart clung to the last to the errant woman whose love had been taken from him, and he lavished upon the child of her guilt the affection of a father. To have 'everybody's goodwill and nobody's notice,' to live under moral suspicion, and be jibed at by the flippant, yet carry on; only men of probity and kindness could remain so impervious. Such a man was

Brandon. Willoughby alone saw his faults, if they were faults. Marianne became blind to his alleged aches and cramps; and would forget the inconstant rake who had jilted her, when she had learnt to cherish the love that was Brandon's.

That Frederick Wentworth gained the heart of sweet nineteen in Anne Elliot with nothing but himself to recommend him, was a romance, indeed, cut short for a time only by the blatant vanity of her people. But Anne at twenty-seven had cause to regret this earlier persuasion and looked back at 'certain wretchedness' for nearly a third part of her life. With such love as hers, with such genius as was his, 'what might not eight years do?' If to Jane Austen, 'Anne was too good,' of Captain Wentworth we might say with Kipling, *he* was 'the man Jane loved.' As R. L. Stevenson came near losing his heart to Barbara, so did Jane to Anne's sailor sweetheart.

You must analyse the lives of Jane Austen's lovers to discover their charm. If to be a hero is to be a model of noble qualities, then really, these charming men of her novels are heroes indeed. Though of gold, they do not glitter. Though apparently cold to touch, they warmed as acquaintance grew. They loved without alloy. Darcy may have been a *beau*, but he was no fop. If Henry Tilney was precise, though he bought gowns for his sister, he was a man. If Edmund Bertram was a prude, he was no fool. George Knightley in leather gaiters was still the gentleman; and flannel waistcoats could not diminish the ardour or add to the warmth of Brandon's heart. Frederick Wentworth had cause to distrust, but even he was no churl. And Edward Ferrars was an honourable man. If affection is love refined, one

knows of nothing so pure or so free from guile, so void of boisterous passion as the love of these men. It is of such love that most women dream of in life though they seldom admire it in books. It is such love that most women share in life, though what they admire in books is but a dream.

To compare with the mild unselfish wooers in Jane Austen, the love of most heroes in fiction is a blind primordial aberration.

We think of Nehludof following Katusha to Siberia; of Henry Bovary mourning for his erring Emma; of the Chevalier des Grieux giving up his hope of heaven; of Gideon Sarn and Heathcliffe; of Rochester and Jude. Such vaporous love as theirs was never unmingled but with lust. The breath of pruriency never tarnished the lips of Jane Austen's lovers.

It has been surmised that because children in those days lived apart from their parents, the discipline was stricter than now. Of the Austen family, however, nothing could be further from the truth. That Jane Austen was carefully brought up, there can be no dispute; but if there were any parental restraint, it must have been of the mildest. And as for discipline in her novels, well, there is none. If it existed at all it was seldom exerted. The loving disrespect of these children, without apparent disobedience toward their parents, must strike the most unobservant reader brought up on the tradition of the alleged prudery and sternness during and in the vicinage of Victoria. There was not in fiction easier-going parents than these patresfamilias in Jane Austen's novels. If a long course of Puritanism had familiarised man's mind with Jewish ideals, the violent

type of father as described by Fielding, Smollett, Sheridan, and personified in *The Way of All Flesh*, there must indeed have been an interregnum to such ideals in the lives of Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope. The world as reflected through the convex mirrors of the Brontës and Samuel Butler has a blurred and darksome aspect, when compared with that seen through the genial eyes of Jane and Anthony. All is a reflection of Jane's own mind, an echo of her own charmed existence. Before she was twenty-one, she came and went with no less freedom than any much abused modern girl. She visited and travelled; danced into the small hours of the morning; did everything most innocently 'profligate and shocking.' If her father, like Mr. Bennet, could not always spare the horses, she would sometimes sleep in her host's nursery, or, accompanied by a brother, walk home in pattened feet through Hampshire lanes, arriving, as the saying is, 'with the milk.' Elizabeth Bennet walked three miles, crossing fields and stiles, from Longbourn to Netherfield to nurse Jane, all alone. Jane Fairfax walked from Donwell Abbey to Highbury, as Emma must have done many times afterwards. Catherine Morland travelled seventy miles in a hack postchaise one Sunday between Northanger and Fullerton. They only did what Jane had done before them, between Steventon and Basingstoke; between Rowling and Goodnestone, 'under the shade of two umbrellas'; and between Chawton and Alton 'in the moonlight.' What the author did, the heroines must do likewise. That one or two lost their hearts, we know; but what Fielding called 'the heavenly part' was never in danger. Her Marguerites, with few exceptions, were equally immune from the prying eyes of their elders, as

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from the machinations of roving Mephistopheles. If one or two of the men sought to raise by flattery, it was not to exact themselves on the ruins of the pride they inspired. Not one of her heroines is tainted with the merest suspicion of immodesty. They were proof against the very shadow of that 'leprosy of animal passion' which John Ruskin found idealised in George Eliot. Their purity inferred, there was indeed no occasion for fear; they lived apparently in a penguinery of innocence.

Mr. Austen, with his parish and his pupils, his farm and his family, had enough to do. Mrs. Morland was 'a good woman, and wished to see her children everything they ought to be; but her time was so much occupied in lying-in – that her elder daughters were inevitably left to shift for themselves.' We could never picture them submitting their children to the ordeal of an examination before they sought their bed, as Richard Feverel was, or calculatingly 'preserving their minds from any visible symptoms of passion.' Such things, we are sure, never entered their heads. The only injunctions Catherine Morland received when leaving home for Bath was to keep her throat wrapped, and her accounts to date. To the pure, all things are pure. The 'general mischievousness' of men had not touched these innocent souls. They even permitted her to flit from Bath with chance acquaintances unchaperoned to their country home. Before handing her heroine to anyone's keeping, Frances Burney would have said, 'I send her to you, innocent as an angel and artless as purity itself.' There was no flummery like that about Jane Austen. Mrs. Dashwood's romantic delicacy forbade her even to question her pining seventeen-year-old daughter as to

whether she was engaged or not. In everything but striving to get her daughters married, Mrs. Bennet was lax. Such of them as wished to learn, never wanted the means; those who chose to be idle certainly might, and though they kept a butler, they had no governess. On the other hand, while Sir Thomas Bertram strove only 'to preserve in the minds of his daughters the consciousness of what they are,' Lady Bertram slept, consoled with her pug, her children did what they pleased. The spoilt Emma could wheedle her father into any frame of mind. Even in the novels of her nonage, Jane Austen's children are rebels, and in those of her maturity they still hold the roost. 'Never shall it be said that I obeyed my father,' is the theme of her first girlish outburst, when fourteen years of age. And in every succeeding novel it was the rule. Really, what discipline could one expect from one whose composition was so mixed as that of Laura? 'My Father,' said she, 'was a native of Ireland and an inhabitant of Wales; my Mother was the natural daughter of a Scotch Peer by an Italian Opera-girl – I was born in Spain and received my education at a convent in France.'

Anne Parker not only forged her own will, but murdered her father and mother, and was going to murder her sister.

It 'reflected no dishonour on the blood' of Philander and Gustavus, that their mothers were never married, though the father of one was Philip Jones, a bricklayer; and of the other, Gregory Staves, a staymaker. Such was the early innocence of Jane Austen. In the words of one of her youthful characters – Edward Lindsey – she might have said of all her novels, 'Did you ever know me consult the inclination or follow the advice of parents in

the least particular since the age of fifteen; nay, since I was five years old?' And having nobly disentangled themselves from the shackles of parental authority, several were united by clandestine marriages. The filial and parental 'If,' which Richardson set forth in such exemplary lights in *Pamela*, was certainly not followed by Jane Austen. Need we enumerate the instances of filial disobedience? No one knew better, that 'where any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they were pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point'; and on this principle she acted, whether the parents wished it or otherwise. They only needed the 'decent appearance of consent,' and even if that were wanting they married just the same. Henry Tilney defied the fury of his father in his steadfast intention to marry Catherine Morland. Mrs. Ferrars, with all her wealth, her despotism, and her 'bitter Philippics,' was thwarted in every dearest wish. One of her sons had been engaged for four years without the secret being divulged; and the other married without her consent. Mrs. Bennet was 'sure Lizzy would be very happy' with Mr. Collins; Lizzy thought otherwise; Mrs. Bennet insisted, Elizabeth was equally insistent. Not even an 'entail' would bribe her. Mr. Bennet said, 'Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*.' It was the triumph of sense over silliness. Lydia disgraced the family, but the mother welcomed her home with open arms and tears of joy. Not even the angry words of her uncle could shake Fanny's resolve not to give her hand where her heart was not inclined, and his own daughters did everything to belie his most fervent ideals. What could you expect from Fanny? Did

not her mother marry to disoblige the family, and 'did it very thoroughly'? Anne Elliot, persuaded once against her will, made no mistake the second time. Reginald de Courcy, but for an accident, would have married the wicked Lady Susan, in spite of his parents' remonstrances. Never were children so indulged. Introduced by way of provision for discourse, young and old were let loose. Like the Trollopes, those who *might* go astray, if they found their own level were preserved only by their own understanding. The young Prices thumped and halloed, rattled up and downstairs, slammed doors, and turned their Portsmouth home into a barn; their father's imprecations passed quite unregarded. The older Bertrams converted Mansfield Park into a playhouse, their rantings and laughter echoed in every room. Who could forget the unruly Thorpes, the pampered Middletons, the persuasive Dashwoods, the frivolous Steeles, or the riotous Musgraves? If the fathers petted, the mothers spoilt, and the grandmothers gave them 'trash and sweet things'; each blamed the other for over indulgence. The Trollopes lovingly called their mother 'Old Madame Vinegar.' The Thorpes, like the Branghtons, were no models of politeness; James said his mother 'looked like an old witch.' Samuel Butler drew Ernest Pontifex as a practical illustration of his theory of *Life and Habit* from his own cantankerous self. So do the novels of Jane Austen mirror the reflections of her own happy girlhood. Her savage parents are secondaries. There are no Squire Westons, or Edward Moulton-Barretts; no Montagues or Capulets, and certainly no James Brodies to hinder love's young dreams. No miserly Grandets, or scientific humanists like Sir Austin Feverel. Sir Thomas Bertram's auto-

cratic sway was more apparent than real. Mr. Bennet troubled little and cared less, his library was kingdom enough for him. The titular magistracy of Lady de Bourgh frightened no one but her tenants. Admiral Crawford had no influence over Henry; Mrs. Churchill had very little over her adopted son, and Mrs. Jennings had none whatever over her daughters. The parents may have reigned, but the children it was who ruled.

It may be 'axiomatic in literature,' as Pater says, 'that to know oneself is interested, is the first condition of interesting other people.' It is not so of life. Boredom is the one bogey all strive to avoid; and life is full of bores. That they interest us in literature is because of their impersonality. We go to them at our pleasure, they speak only when spoken to, and come only when called, they cease without bidding, and depart without offence. To make them so enchanting in her novels, how many had Jane Austen to endure? The 'fat girls with long noses that disturbed her,' the 'short girls with wide mouths' that annoyed her, the tall girls 'with fingers fluently harmonious' she suffered, the 'pictures of perfection' she had met; in the 'stupid parties she attended,' the 'everyday remarks, dull repetitions, old news and heavy jokes' she tolerated, her 'visions of good and ill breeding, of old vulgarisms and new gentilities.' All, however, was as grist to her mill. But what surprises us, is the humour of it all, the glow of gentle satire that pervades the whole. The fun she extracted from stupidity, and the laughter that exudes from so much pride. The 'commonplace raillery' of Mrs. Jennings; 'the busy idleness' of Mrs. Allen. The supercilious airs of Parson Collins; the 'rich, superior, long-worded

arbitrariness' of Fanny's uncle. The 'horrible insensibilities' of groundlings like Sir John Middleton, 'so loud in his admiration at the end of every song, and louder in his conversation while every song lasted.' The flattering imbecilities of Mrs. Palmer, who could look at Elinor's drawings 'for ever, and sitting down, forget there were any such things in the room.' 'Poor Charlotte! with her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry.' Lydia Bennet, taking off her glove to exhibit her wedding ring. Lucy Steele, staying on at Dawlish, because 'she had many relations and acquaintances to cut.' And Mrs. Churchill, who 'always travels with her own sheets.' The manœuvres of Mrs. Bennet. The stratagems of Emma: and Mrs. Grant, 'who more than filled her favourite sitting-room with pretty furniture.'

She who so benignly observed the foibles of others needs must be humorous herself. Mr. Woodhouse does not arrive one hour too soon, or Miss Bates bring too long a day. In a phrase of Mr. Chesterton, 'We seem to see a thousand spinsters, sitting at a thousand tea-tables, and they all could have written *Emma* if they had the mind.' How naïve, what simpletons! In that which Scott envied, and Miss Mitford's right hand could not achieve, Jane Austen excelled, the gentle art of mild ridicule. To portray without offence the natural history of gentility, their manners, their follies, their nonsense, Jane knew them all, their lights and shadows; nothing escaped her vigilant eye. They brighten every page; without them her works would be dull indeed. No 'essay on writing; critique on Walter Scott, or history of Buonaparte,' as she once intended, could more happily stretch out or give shade to the crowded hours of the

Longbourn family, the gaieties of Bath, the airs of Mansfield, or the frolics of Highbury.

We think sometimes that Jane herself may have been a bit of a bore to her many brothers, relations, and friends. Her friends especially must have discovered that beneath that 'perpendicular precise and taciturn exterior' there lay the observant novelist, weaving plots and quietly storing in her mind shreds of their inanities. 'People fancied, knowing that she was clever, that she was on the watch,' as 'Lady Middleton' 'fancied Elinor and Marianne were satirical, because they were fond of reading.' In her presence they may have felt some repressive influence that damped their levity. Viewed from their angle she was perhaps 'a poker.' That she was so patient in reviewing the novel of her niece; dramatised *Sir Charles Grandison* from the dictation of a child, and read aloud the opening chapters of another by her nephew, it was only a just infliction in recompense for others who had, at one time, done as much for her. She must perforce, and in fairness, endure others, as she herself had, and was perhaps then endured. That she was a genius, and the others mediocrities, we have no doubt whose was the greater punishment. If Jane, however, thought Anna in her novel gave 'too many particulars of right hand and left,' and criticised her 'novel slang,' Anna also thought 'Miss Bates excellent, but rather too much of her.' Most of Jane's youthful effusions were dedicated to various members of the family, but that they read or even looked at them, we doubt. Her apprenticeship had been a long one, but apart from Henry, Cassandra, and her mother – until her first work was published – the others knew she was an incessant scribbler, but like a primrose by the river's

brim to Peter Bell, she was nothing more. We do not complain, probably, had she been a sister of ours, we should have thought just as little of her. Even Milton must have been a prosy old bore to his daughters, with his midnight moonings. Really, if Samuel Butler thought five pounds too much for *Paradise Lost*, why should we look askance at these girls, if they found making embroidery for a living, paradise regained, to the ordeal of 'ironing' the fitful outbursts of a grumpy old puritan genius. What did Mrs. Hooker care for her husband or his *Ecclesiastical Polity* if the cradle wanted rocking? Distance alone lends enchantment to the lives of the great. It is a truth, that to most people, next to hearing a poet or a novelist read his own effusions in private, nothing would bore us so much as being asked to read them for him. Not even for Jane herself. Even Tennyson reading his *Harold* sent Gladstone to sleep.

We are convinced, however, that Jane Austen was more bored than boring. Like Trollope, though 'sensitive to praise and at times pathetically eager for it,' she hid her identity so that even the servants would never guess she wrote a scrap, and charged her brothers not to divulge the secret. The creaking of an unoiled hinge – such a raucous noise as would have scattered all Schopenhauer's thoughts and made Carlyle mad – was more tolerable than unwelcome guests. What with her aged mother; 'great wash' – 'the torments of rice pudding and apple dumplings' – and 'the doubtful sweets of housekeeping, in a country village,' can we wonder at her 'not wanting to be agreeable, as it saved her,' as she said, 'the trouble of liking people a great deal.' Indeed, that her consequence suffered so much at times, when people were apt to ignore her, may, we

think, account for that tinge of seeming hardness and Johnsonian impatience which we find sometimes in her disposition toward the whims and sufferings of others; to find such, however, needs much searching for, beneath her abundance of good humour.

To be a Scarabeeist in art, tenderly impaling your victims, and love them; to write and write and keep on writing, 'luxuriating in endless felicity' and be content; 'equally immune' as Mr. Squire says, 'against the imaginary charms of Crusaders, of Corsairs or sheikhs.' Not even the obtuseness of booksellers, the tepid admiration of her family, or the indifference of friends could break this resolve. Few even, among her acquaintances, guessed that Jane was a novelist. Her revenge, however, though not intended as such, was quite as sweet; she drew them in their native haunts and unobserved. When she dropped her needle and took up her pen to jot down some scraps of conversation, we have a shrewd idea what she chuckled at. Happy the woman who can grin with others and shut up, while in her heart she nurses some foible that to her friends may be equally inane. To 'The Poet at the Breakfast Table' bores were the coral insects that build a reef; one-storey intellects, others with good ground floors, but bare of furniture in the attics. It is this contrariety of mind that gives zest to existence. There is this to be said after all for the bores of Jane Austen, they were no specialists; they talked on everything in general, but of nothing long. Their obsessions were little ones, that is their virtue. Screens are exhibited, harps unpacked, cabinets of medals examined; we read of tambour frames, of working filigree by candlelight, of transparences and fringe, of 'inclosing land and breaking horses.' There are 'bending little

minds,' 'prosing women,' 'tiresome wretches,' and 'spiteful old ladies,' but of particular discourse there is very little. There are admirals and generals, colonels and captains, baronets and squires, magistrates and sportsmen, lawyers and clergymen, landowners and slave traders, bankers and merchants. Gay young friskers, grave old plodders, land thieves and water thieves, gipsies and chairmen. But you find nothing about invasion or war, of revolution or rebellion, of politics or law, of medicine or slavery, of land or steam-engines; Jane took care of that. Old and middle-aged were hostages bound to the revels of youth. Her novels are the paradise of young people. 'They met for the sake of eating, drinking, and laughing, playing at cards or consequences.' The one object of every gathering was billing and cooing. To this end all was set. The parents plotted, the old abetted, the bores assisted. Age filled in the scenes as supernumeraries, to aid or thwart, to prompt or disgust; while youth disported in the foreground for the play. They talked of love, of courtship, of marriage, of happiness, wealth, and beauty. It was the language of the heart unspoilt with too much book learning; the language of an age before popular science and outlines of everything had estranged it. There are no preaching clergymen such as Trollope deplored. No wrangling barristers, or shallow pedants such as bored Addison. Jane Austen's bores are not even 'one-storey intellects,' unless Mrs. Elton, who could expatiate on strawberries, as Mrs. Nickleby did on hackney coaches, was one. They were just ordinary folk. All their talk was of 'little home news.' Vicar Morland was contented with a pun, his wife with a proverb. All Mrs. Bennet's indiscretions spring from loving her

daughters, not wisely but too well. To ruffle the calm languor of Lady Bertram, or annoy Mrs. Allen, you had only to tease the pug of one or tumble the gown of the other. The spiteful ones come under other categories. For now, it is the innocents who claim our attention. Of vices they had none; they just ooze in natural goodness. The most interesting of all is Mr. Woodhouse, 'whose most famous sentences,' as Dr. Bradley says, 'hang like texts in frames on the four walls of our memories; he is, next to Don Quixote, perhaps, the most perfect gentleman in fiction.' John Bailey, however, 'thought him an old woman.' In spite of his 'habits of gentle selfishness – his provoking peculiarities and fidgetiness,' who could not love him or deny his extreme tenderness of heart? His fatherly concern for everybody's comfort, his admonitions as to the care of everybody's health, his quaint old-fashioned politeness; indeed, like Turgenev's Fomishka, 'time seemed to have stood still for him.' Who can fail to see, that to the daughter of a former Vicar of Steventon, the daughter of a former Vicar of Highbury was a sister in distress? But whereas one talked, the other took to the pen, and moralises on the isolation of celibacy, which but for her brothers, would have made her life equally painful and dependent as was the character she portrayed. Indeed, had every other work of Jane Austen perished, and *Emma* alone remained, her fame would have endured as long as the language she wrought in. To use a phrase of Pater's, 'Like that of the oldest goldsmiths as described by Apuleius, she enriched the work by far more than the weight of precious metal she removed.'

Really, the bores of Jane Austen, though bored with one another, delight us as much as the heroines. John

Knightley was at times quite impatient with his father-in-law, as Darcy was with Mrs. Bennet. Marianne was as bored with Mrs. Jennings as Catherine must have been with Mrs. Allen. Miss Bates bored Emma, and there is no doubt that Emma bored Jane Fairfax. 'An airing in the Hartfield carriage would have been the rack, and arrowroot from the Hartfield storeroom must have been poison.' There was the silly Mr. Collins; the languorous Lady Bertram; the 'insufferable Mrs. Elton'; the 'empty-headed' Sir John Lucas; the medicinal Diana Parker. In one we have a 'great wonderer'; the other with her 'pert, pretentious and underbred finery.' One was a shopkeeper turned gentleman, the other an imaginary invalid. They are all very human, just the kind of men and women who make up the mosaic of life, whose good nature none can dispute, whose kindness everybody extols. They bring and itch for news, and all who can, though they do not shun, avoid them. Offend them you cannot, and would not if you could. Yet 'translated' into the pages of these novels, who could be more entertaining. Turn to them as often as you will, their memories are evergreen. Age cannot wither nor time decay their inward cleanliness of mind; the homely charm and sweet insouciance that imbue their presence. To compare with the garrulous bores of golf, bowls, or business, the 'pert pretensions' of Masonry, of Rotary, or Moose, the bores of Jane Austen – Kipling's 'None-such' – his 'Secret Society woman' – are indeed an oasis. It would require the thwacks of Swift's bludgeon humour, rather than the rapier of Jane Austen's irony, to make any impression at all on our modern thick-skinned bubbles of conceit.

It has been said that Jane Austen's clergymen are all indigenous specimens of the species clerical; and in the gross as undistinguished from their reverend brethren as Fabre's Pine-Processionaries from one another. To compare with the maturity of the Barchester prelates, they are indeed little embryos. The little we know of them is certainly an earnest of what their blossoming would be. Luckily for them, they were with one or two unimportant exceptions, all young. What a real ripe cleric would look like from her pen, we can visualise in the meek, the pompous, the servile members of their fraternity as pictured in the rich pages of Trollope. As we see them, they are a mild, innocuous sample; though surely not insipid likenesses of each other in details, they seem to lack the prime attributes usually associated with the profession. That the majority of them are gentlemen, there is no doubt. One was the elder, another the younger, and one the only son; and another the male heir; all to landed estates. We do not know that they had any ruling passion such as we read of in Pope. But to use a phrase of Sterne, they all have a hobby-horse. One loved a garden, another loved dogs. One was fond of horses, another an expert on whist. One was a selfish *bon vivant*, another 'nothing but a country curate.' They danced, they acted, they played, they gambled, they loved; one alone was a misery to himself and was, but for his mother, 'a might-have-been.'

Jane could never hope to please every one; and such pictures, to at least two of her critics, gave great displeasure. 'To draw such clergymen in such times as these,' according to them, 'was wrong.' There can be no doubt, however, as to the reality of her portraits. If there was anything wrong, we are convinced that the

subject rather than the portrayer was to blame. Really, if there are a few warts in one's make-up, he should account himself fortunate that such innocent blemishes are not caricatured. A vicar's daughter would never lack sitters for such studies. The family radiated clergymen. Jane Austen was the granddaughter, daughter, sister, and aunt of clergymen. If in her pages she gave us no inoffensive 'Old Catguts,' neither are there any scheming 'Obadiah Slopes.' Mr. Goldwin Smith found her comic characters like those of Molière, 'thoroughly generic'; he added, however, 'that there never was a Mr. Collins, any more than there was a Tartuffe.' Macaulay, also, must have had some qualms on this point when he omitted this gentleman from his comparisons. Lord Brabourne thought Mr. Collins 'slightly exaggerated' though 'a not uncommon character.' To John Bailey he was immortal and a caricature like Micawber. And George Saintsbury thought him far greater than anything Addison did; more real than a hundred prime ministers and archbishops. To Archbishop Whatley he was 'a servile young sprig of divinity.' And Kipling's 'Humberstall,' when he was a boy scout, said that "Im or 'is twin brother was our troop leader.' 'Always on the make an' looking to marry money.' He even re-chalked the old Mark Five Nine-point-two, from 'Spittin' Jim' to 'The Reverend Collins.' Indeed, who has not in his time run across this type of clerical anachronism? 'The conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man, whose pleasing attentions were the result of previous study – a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility' – who would, like the Goncourts' Abbé Blampoix, make 'a good spiritual director of well-born consciences.'

Or the smug, self-satisfied Vicar of Highbury, 'who when he has ladies to please, every feature works.'

Or a nonentity like Edward Ferrars, the gentleman turned clergyman. Designed by his family to be a distinguished man, for want of employment, he foolishly engages himself to a silly girl; repents at leisure, and luckily gets jilted through procrastination. The plums, however, were his. Never was apathy so rewarded. The church he may have deserved, but Elinor never. Like Lobourne's hopeless curate – 'the appearance of the man was that of an embodied sigh and groan.' He had all the virtues, but nothing besides to ornament his goodness.

Or Parson Bertram, the future Rector of Thornton Lacey, upright but insipid; yet he would compromise his conscience rather than sully the dignity of his family by inviting the intimacy 'the *more* than intimacy – the familiarity' of their inferiors.

Or the short-necked Dr. Grant, the gourmet, who, like Mr. Supple, had 'great taciturnity at table, though his mouth was never shut at it,' and died from apoplexy through over-eating. His sin that of the Continent monk – gluttony.

Or Henry Tilney, the gallant Vicar of Woodston, who had courage enough to brave his father's ire, and would marry, 'though his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude.'

They are indeed, all '*very, very* natural.' More or less true to type, though they do not, thankfully, exhaust it. There are no bigots like John de Stogumber; or a rector of Harrow Hoeward, 'stern only to smile again,' unless Vicar Morland was such. Though highly respectable, and to a degree good mannered, as ministers of grace

they appear placid and unconvincing, quite unfitted in temperament and accomplishments to be zealous defenders of the faith. Their piety was a thin cloak, their learning a fortuitous link, means to a living rather than an aid to religion. There is nothing to guide us, not even a tract or a sermon from which to learn that they bore with the idolatry of Rome, or tolerated the 'infidelity of Socinianism.' Luckily, Jane Austen never bothered her head about such things. Nothing even to show their concern for the 'Poor Papuans.' Emma knew something of the 'slave trade' and 'nurse trade'; but the parsons, as far as we know, say nothing. Indeed, our souls, though no worse, would be little better for their keeping. That they were good we admit, but we could never picture Mrs. Elton telling her *cara sposo*, as Mrs. Quiverful did, 'You are too good, too soft, too yielding.' They certainly never temporised with wickedness, like the Rev. Roger Thwackum. We doubt very much, however, whether Samuel Johnson would appoint any of them to the 'office of forming supplications to the throne of heaven.' If one or two are a disgrace to the Church, the others are ornaments that do no great credit to religion. We believe that Butler's Ernest Pontifex had more grit and erudition than the lot put together. Thackeray has told us that 'A poor curate with a large family was always an object of constant satire.' That in Jane Austen they were all richly endowed with the world's goods does certainly make them objects of derision, when to make up for their other foibles they were compensated with no great strength of intellect. That she could have chosen better ones we admit, but that these best suited her purpose none can deny. Religion was by no means reviled. No

one knew better the true significance of the word 'evangelical,' than Jane Austen. It was not the clergy, but the men who happened to be clergymen she derided. As a clergyman's daughter, she had every means of knowing, and we cannot gainsay her authority on such a subject. When she writes, 'A clergyman is nothing; indolence and love of ease, nothing to do but be slovenly and selfish, read his newspaper, watch the weather and quarrel with his wife,' we must remember the flippant character into whose mouth she puts these words. Fanny Price was their devout champion. To Edmund Bertram, 'as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation.' We agree. A clergyman, however, should be what the rest of the nation are not. And we cannot hide the fact, that all Jane's clerics, have one, the other, or all these failings. Though in theory perhaps, she knew them to be cast in other moulds, she proclaims their weaknesses in practice. To be quite frank none were called and few were chosen to this sacred profession; indeed the divinity of one or two was little better than Sancho Panza's. If their souls were better covered with 'good old Christian fat,' that little was nothing to boast of.

Putting

Please don't burden yourself taking this book — to your office in all insolence

XI

A PILGRIMAGE

DEAR Jane, we take our leave. We have followed you through seedtime and harvest, from cradle to the grave. From Steventon to Oxford, to Southampton, to Reading to Kent and London, then back to Steventon, and on again to Chawton. Few children at the age of twelve could boast such adventures as yours. Those girlish fantasies you wrote recall as no biography could, not only the innocence of your impressions, but the depth of your happiness and carefree childhood.

Of that peaceful abode little now remains. Cows ruminate upon the scene of many a bliss. Nothing is left us save the pump. Gone the woodwalk and shrubbery, the thorns and lilac. Gone the chestnuts and the firs, the elms and spruces, the mountain ash and the acacias. All is grass; and but for a clump of sycamores, meadow unrelieved. No Catherine Morland, however noisy and wild, would roll down so uninviting a green slope as we saw. Gone the drive and weathercock, the sundial and the kitchen garden, 'with the constant eyesore of its formalities and decaying vegetation.' Bordering hedgerows there are, and possibly dormant primroses and anemones, but gone is the parsonage and its dairy, the stage and its properties; gone indeed are all the sentimental tangibilities that would connect us to the view. In our mind's eye alone, we see it as Jane saw it. Here

came the Comtesse fresh from France, and pendent revolution; from Westminster Hall that echoed with the eloquence of Sheridan, Burke, and Fox; from Beaumont Lodge where the 'Governor,' her godfather, brooded. Here came Jane's big brother Edward, fresh from Dresden and Rome. From here went the future admirals to Portsmouth and the high seas; and the others to Oxford and 'to clerge.' From here Jane, dressed in her best, went to the assembly balls at Basingstoke, the private parties at Deane and Manydown, and from here she dispensed her charities to the poor. Here also came news of the Egyptian squadron off the Isle of Cyprus; of promotions and prizes. There is nothing in all these commonplace occurrences that distinguishes them from hundreds of their like; other parsonages have sent forth equally gifted and industrious children, but for one particular, and that, the genius of a seventh child. But for Jane, few pilgrims would wander from their way to see a desolate pump in a green field. Hampshire is beautiful, but without Jane Austen, Gilbert White, and Isaak Walton, other counties have equal charm for us. Steventon, though chronicled in Domesday Book, would be just another parsonage set in a corner of rural England. Just another 'Sweet Auburn,' where in citizen comfort a kind parson reared his eight children. Here, however, Jane first saw the light of day; here she romped and roamed, flirted and danced, loved and lost, scribbled and aspired. On this spot were the first glimmerings of her genius inspired; the first tale, the first essay, the first history, the first letter, and with fluttering expectations, the first novel packed and sealed to London, and also, by return of post, the first editor's regret.

Though no stone of the parsonage remains, above us

stands the church, its portal shaded by an ancient yew in crabbed old age, coeval with the edifice of sober grey it sentinels. With echoing footfalls, we pace around this stronghold of an enduring faith; with eyes upon its thick-set walls and squat proportions. All is silent as the grave. We approach the massive door and find it locked. It is twilight; we are in haste and about to depart, when a passing woodman questioning our curiosity, takes from the hollow yew the wished-for key – such a key as we had never seen before, it must have been a foot in length and surely over a pound in weight, made like the church itself, to outlast centuries. Had Jane ever handled this? To hold it was a curiosity we could not forbear. We enter; a dozen paces from the porch, and the whole is spanned. So small a sanctuary the family itself could almost fill. In the fading light we hasten past details; oil lamps now take the place of candles. Here is the squire's pew, tall and trellised, of solid oak, the relic of some bygone privilege, now shabby and disused. Here is the choir, there the tablets *in memoriam*. Here the Austens man and boy sat beside their lowlier compatriots and received their first lessons in humility. Here Jane and Cassandra worshipped. Here was the day-old Jane baptized and later received. We picture her leaving her seat to take her first communion. Here 'Joseph Barley and Mary Wilkins of this parish' were married, with Jane as witness and recorder. These were the scenes that for twenty-six years she had partaken of; all of which were left behind for the 'insipidities' of Bath, the vulgar economies of Southampton, relieved only upon occasion by the happier gaieties of Kent, and the welcome hospitalities of London.

Eight years of enforced truancy had sickened Jane. She longed for the peace and serenity of her old surroundings. Nothing of note could she accomplish outside these tranquil and innocent abodes. Deep-rooted as were her preferences, she thirsted for those quiet whilom simplicities where alone her genius throve. And back she came.

We stand now on the cross roads before Chawton Cottage. The posting inn that was, the steward's house to be; then the house of Jane; and now part flats, part workmen's club. We look upon its dull red brick and melancholy aspect, nothing but shabby gentility remains. The bricked-in window that once looked out upon the road, stares in naked ugliness. Gone are the bordering palings and flowers within that edged its base; and gone the creepers that must have veiled its walls. Dishevelled and unkempt it stands; forlorn, decrepit. Though better, perhaps, to live in penury, than be buried in a backyard at Hitchin like the home of Sir Isaac Newton.

> 'The self-same sun that shines upon a court
> Hides not his visage from the cottage, but
> Looks on all alike.'

On all alike, in growth, maturity, and decay. We forget the present, however, and think of it only as it was; for eight years the home of Jane Austen. We peep into the garden and visualise the shrubbery border. We think of the laburnum and mignonette, the 'young peony, the pinks and sweet williams,' the syringas and columbines she once delighted in. We think of the orchard walk with its quickset hedge; the Orleans plumbs – spelt with a 'b' as Lamb loved – the solitary apricot which one of the

family had detected; and of the scarlet strawberries she found, which would have been a pleasure lost had Cassandra been at home; and the peas, the gathering of which brought to her mind *The Lady of the Lake*. Here in the heyday of composition she rambled for refreshment. We peer into the large parlour; it looks more like a storeroom than a club; a cabin indeed. Around a bagatelle table stray cues and other paraphernalia are littered. Was this the room where Jane – not to disturb the family – played the pianoforte before breakfast? Was it here she entertained her visitors in the afternoon, and sang to her own accompaniment in the evenings, when her eyes ached and her pen drooped? We cannot help thinking also, that it was with this happy garden prospect in view that much of her writing was done. As Buffon wrote better with his cuffs on, James Joyce when apparelled in white, and Tschaikowsky composed best when dressed for the occasion, we fancy that Jane somehow 'felt so much more elegant' in the parlour than in the common sitting-dining-room. We stand again at the front entrance; we seem to see her stepping forth, firm and sprightly, the expectant novelist full of hope, with *Sense and Sensibility* under her arm ready for publication; now with *Pride and Prejudice*, again with *Mansfield Park*, and anon with *Emma*. From here she goes to Alton fair, to Bookham, to Steventon, to Ibthorp, to Cheltenham, several times to London, and once in state to Godmersham, one of five in her brother's carriage, followed by two post-chaises filled with eight more of the household, another two by chair, two on horseback, and the rest by coach; which scene and its happy consummation reminds her of St. Paul's shipwreck. To house so large a family, we can picture

the 'five tables, eight and twenty chairs, and two fires,' which Jane once had all to herself. We now follow in her footsteps down the Gosport road to the Great House she loved, and the church she worshipped in; where 'Dear Henry' preached and sometimes Mr. Cooper, 'full of regeneration and conversion.' We linger in and around this little earthly paradise; we know of no scene more beautiful than the setting that surrounds this church and Tudor mansion, with its carpet lawns, its laurels trimmed and stately yews. Here Jane's mother lies, and Cassandra, dearest of all. Here was the background of every novel, and together with Steventon Manor, inseparable from Norland and Barton, Longbourn and Pemberley, Hartfield and Donwell, Mansfield and Kellynch. Every nook and cranny, its woods and walks, she knew. There is hardly a character, but she embroidered with traits and conversations garnered in her walks between the Cottage and the Great House. We retrace our steps again to the Cottage; this time with sadness, Jane is ill. In everything but spirit Jane declines; few guessed it, the whooping cough contracted a few years before had left its mark; which together with not a few disappointments, and tedious sedentary labours, had set in its trail a pulmonary affection. We think of those last days, the ominous rests between her walks, those hectic symptoms and enervating discharges that kept her in bed for weeks; the feverish nights, weakness and languor she struggled to overcome. Like all who are consumptive, we are sure, she wanted so much to live. The temporary couch was an expedient; the donkey ride up Mounters Lane, a gesture. It was an assumption of convalescence she felt not; it was the spirit fighting to free itself from the coils of its sick embodiment. Weeks of indisposition,

followed by short intervals of seeming recovery, were aggravated by graver disorders. February, March, and April pass. The local doctor can do no more. Jane leaves Chawton for the last time.

We now follow the carriage slowly along the road to Winchester, and skirting the Cathedral Close, we stand before the house in College Street, where Jane, with pen in hand and mind unimpaired, drooped and withered, lingered and died.

We stand with Cassandra and watch the little cortege out of sight; and as Trollope followed the old Warden to his resting-place, we see her lowered to her grave in the Cathedral, which she had loved so well. 'It was but a short journey from her bedroom to her grave.' Mourned only by her family, Winchester knew her not. Her burial was as simple as her life. The last but one to arrive, the first to depart. Unheralded she came, unheralded she went. Not even death could raise the obscurity in which she lived. Few were the eyes that saw her laid in that demure grave within the cloisters. The name, the figure, the voice, the achievements of Jane Austen were familiar only to a numbered few; yet to-day, the Cathedral she honours with her bones, rests less secure upon its base than the fame she knew not. William of Wykeham in all his pomp, looks up upon the glory of his creation, but beneath that simple slab of mourning marble, and the verger's vestry rug, lie those whose fancies monuments have woven more lasting than this canopy of chiselled stone. The legends that cleave to the shrine of Saint Swithin must vie henceforth with the certain charms of Isaak the piscator, and Jane the novelist. Winchester stands where it was, but the heart of their world is warmed in the dimmest

corners of the earth at the sight and touch of those few small volumes; little bits of Hampshire, that breathe for ever England. Those who knew Jane best loved her for what she was, more than what she did. No better epitaph would please her. To be noticed in the *Annual Register* – though such did not happen – would be less desirable to her than to know that her memory would be held in tender regret. To be moaned as a friend and sister would be dearer to her heart than to be extolled as a writer. Though the world knew her not, in the bosom of her family she was an idol.

Fifty-three years elapse before the outside world knew anything of the intimacies of her charming life. The youngest of the mourners who attended her funeral was an old man when he published the only record of the aunt he loved, knew, and corresponded with, but otherwise thought so little of. He set alight, however, a flambeau that lit the way to the heart of Jane Austen, and henceforth 'every line from her pen was precious.' But the most valued treasure of all was hidden away in a little square box; and another fourteen years pass before its contents were divulged to the thirsting faithful. Her long eclipse is now at an end. Biographies follow one another at frequent intervals. To Professor Caroline Spurgeon 'every scrap of information and every ray of light on Jane Austen are of national importance.' To the invaluable bibliography of her works by Geoffrey Keynes, her dictionary by G. L. Apperson has now been added; and Dr. Chapman's edition of her letters at last proclaims the triumph of his pledge. Pilgrimages to her shrines are undertaken and illustrated, juvenilia unearthed, and collotype facsimiles in expensive editions published. Duologues and scenes from the novels are

arranged and adapted for drawing-room performance. Her quotations are classified, her allusions annotated, her orthography amended, and her archæologisms strung together. Watermarks are examined, immature fragments scrutinised and her correspondence catalogued. There are abridgments and connected extracts, scenes and selections; a questionnaire, and introductions of every hue, and wonderful shades in essays, all rich in texture and of wide research. Not forgetting her patient illustrators, the superb line drawings of Hugh Thomson, W. C. Cooke, the Brocks, Chris Hammond and A. Wallis Mills. And now, an omnibus edition of her works is in every shop window; *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Love and Freindship* have even been dramatised. The learned search for first intentions. Museums proudly exhibit her handiwork. *The Times* gives pride of place to a few unpublished letters. After her name, Mr. Kipling founds a new sisterhood. There are plaques to her memory everywhere. Even the misadventure of a heroine is plaqued. In marble and oak they severally commemorate her residence in Bath and Chawton. Beside her tomb in Winchester, her name is writ on brass; and above, a Latin inscription beneath the harps of David in stained glass points her worth. The Maid of Orleans already looks down upon us; and the day is not far distant when the 'Divine Jane,' like patience on a monument smiling at fame, will keep her company.

It is our journey's end and Jane's birthday. The bells are carolling for Christmas. The hoar-frost on the trees glistens in the flickering light as through an evening mist we see the Cathedral's mountainous mass take shape. We linger round the cloisters, and pace along the close,

and anon up narrow stairs through darksome galleries and winding steeps land aloft behind scenes of grandeur. Jane sleeps peacefully below. One hundred and fifty-seven years divide us from her birth, and one hundred and fifteen from the death that brought her within its pale, her glory undimmed amid its kings and bishops.

Beneath the green shade her six small volumes stand on a level, cheek by jowl with the masters of our tongue; Addison on the right of her, Swift to the left. We take them down with fond regard, and open where we will, familiar faces whose presence never stale greet us at every turn. Some trait we had missed brings others in its train. Something we had forgotten is seen in a new light; something new discovered we had passed by unobserved. No reading can exhaust the ingenuity of Emma, the charming implacability of Elizabeth, the quiet constancy of Fanny, the affectionate prudence of Elinor, or the patient devotion of Anne. Jane Austen's appreciation of the usual, so infinite in its variety, is an art that never can grow old. Read them ever so often, they cloy not, neither do they pall.

'Jane went to Paradise;
That was only fair.
Good Sir Walter met her first,
And led her to the stair.

'Henry and Tobias,
And Miguel of Spain,
Stood with Shakespeare at the top
To welcome Jane.'

KIPLING.

XII

AN ANTHOLOGY

No anthology of English literature would be complete without selections from the works of Jane Austen, many of which we have delighted in. We have yet to discover, however, the book of quotations where she is represented, though lesser luminaries are duly niched with far less worthy specimens of fame than we have found in the novels of Jane. There are certainly no sentences pre-eminently beautiful in her works; a fact which she herself would be the first to admit. Nothing so brief that we could say it breathed some deep philosophy. Nothing pretty enough for an album, or pithy enough for an axiom. She strove after no such delicacies. Everything she wrote was practical. She polished no sentence to the bone, as we might say of Pope. In matters of love, courtship, matrimony, manners, and common sense, there are, however, few better guides than Jane, and few truisms more apposite than we have found scattered in her pages.

'In nine cases out of ten a woman had better show more affection than she feels.'

'Is not general incivility the very essence of love?'

'Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.'

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